Younger buyers find value in time-share investments

Cost and commitment not for everyone, but it's appealing to those who love to travel. **In Money**

This week's Forum: Your say on election security

We asked readers to weigh in on President Trump's claims about fraud. **In Opinion**

USA TODAY

THE NATION'S NEWS | $3 | MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2026

KELSIE WHITMORE BY JESSIE ALCHEH/GETTY IMAGES

Women's baseball league finds momentum

New professional league is building a movement and everyone is realizing the magnitude, columnist Bob Nightengale writes. **In Sports**

Marine pests may hitch ride in strait

'Super-spreader event' risk builds as ships idle

Christopher Cann
USA TODAY

Stalled commercial ship traffic near the Strait of Hormuz is not only a threat to oil markets and global economies. Scientists warn that the idling vessels could unleash an invasive marine "super-spreader event" when trade resumes.

The Iran war has forced a halt to more than 1,500 vessels near the strategic waterway since the U.S.-Israel war on Iran began Feb. 28. Traffic has remained restricted for months as Washington and Tehran battle over control of the vital trade route, which carries one-fifth of the world's oil and natural gas supply.

A new study produced by an international coalition of marine scientists warns that invasive marine organisms that have grown on the ships' hulls could pose a significant threat to ecosystems across the globe when the ships reach their final destinations.

Restrictions in the Strait of Hormuz have given invasive organisms time to grow on ships' hulls. REUTERS

"If you had to sort of design a worst-case scenario, it would look a lot like this," said Mario Tamburri, a professor at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and the study's lead author. "It's a perfect storm."

When ships are stationary for periods of days or weeks, the submerged parts of the vessel can become colonized by microbes, algae and other marine organisms. These organisms, when introduced to other ecosystems, can cause a wide array of consequences, from outcompeting native species to damaging infrastructure to introducing pathogens harmful to marine life and, sometimes, humans.

Researchers say the buildup of waterborne organisms can reach "rapid growth phase" after about 10 days. Cargo ships in most ports idle for less than two days on average. But many ships trapped near the Strait of Hormuz have remained there for months.

Compounding the threat is the fact that the ships became stalled at the start of spring, a season of growth and reproduction as waters warm. The

See THREAT, Page 3A

Friction between Iran, Ukraine spurs concerns

Ambassador: Kyiv has no interest in merging U.S. war against Tehran. **2A**

Online: Visit **usatoday.com** to get the latest updates on the U.S.-Iran war.

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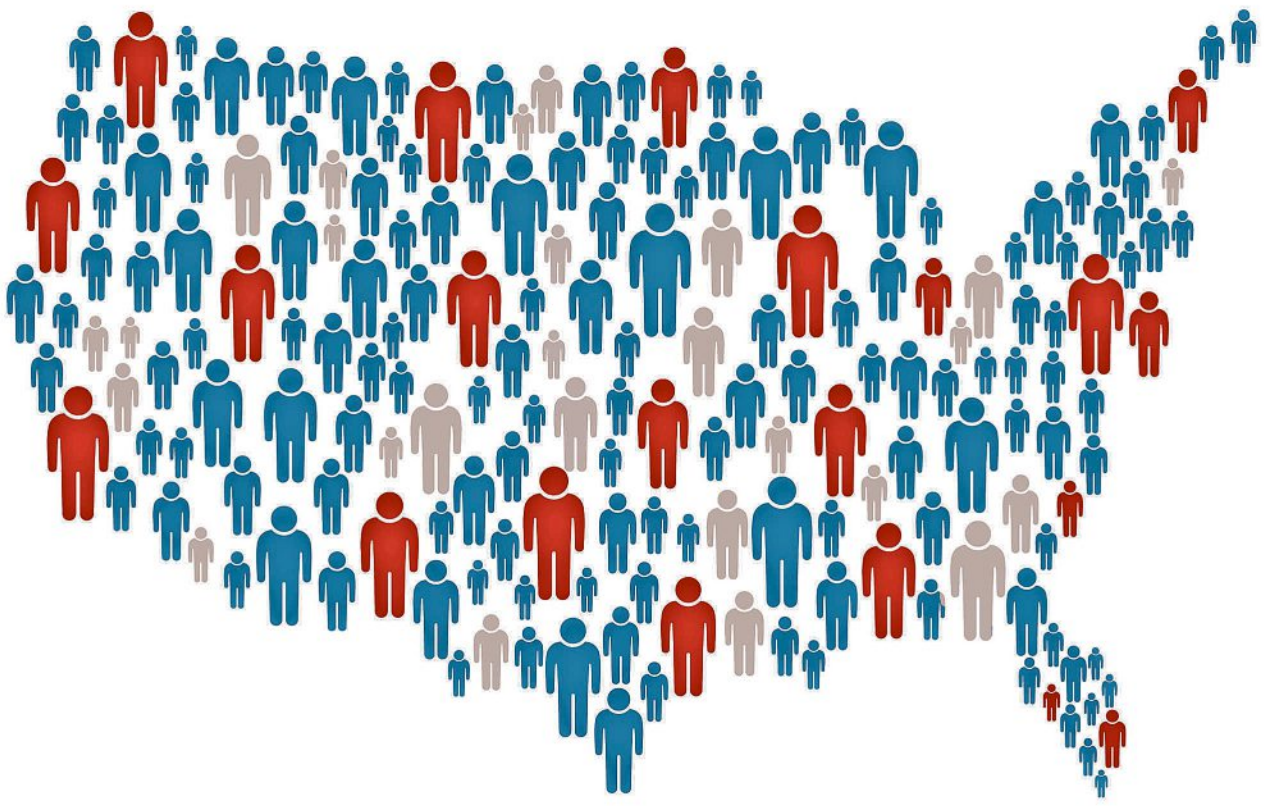


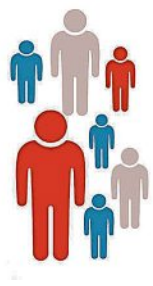
Independent voters in key states reveal what moves needle for them

Terry Collins USA TODAY

John Marvin lives in Florida. Sandi Hebley resides in Texas. And Sophie Gelling calls Pennsylvania her home. They live in different corners of the nation, but they have one thing in common. • They're all independent voters weighing their options, figuring out what impact they might have on key races in the crucial midterm elections. • These voters are a fulcrum on which the middle shifts in every race. And their vote may never be as important. About 4 in 10 registered U.S. voters say they are independent, according to recent polls by Gallup and the Pew Research Center.

Those findings are intriguing, especially in a polarized nation with a president who seeks to enact the SAVE America Act, which could jeopardize voter rights, according to John Opdycke, founder and president of Open Primaries, a voter advocacy nonprofit.

"A lot of people are noticing the rise of independent voters," Opdycke said. He explained that fewer people want to be tied to the traditional parties, and more politicians are taking notice.



A snapshot shows that independent voters shifted between 8 and 11 percentage points toward Donald Trump in 2024, likely determining the outcome of the election, according to the Independent Center, a nonprofit advocacy group based in Washington, DC.

The Independent Center also said 43 congressional races were decided by 5% or less, also possibly determined by

See INDEPENDENTS, Page 6A

GARY STELZER/USA TODAY NETWORK; AND GETTY IMAGES

Sweater company threads in politics

Its 'Give a Damn' line aims to make sass chic

Jay Stahl
USA TODAY

When Rachelle Hruska MacPherson founded her New York clothing company a decade ago, she didn't imagine celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Martha Stewart would be donning her sweaters.

MacPherson also didn't expect her brand, Lingua Franca, which produces hand-stitched cashmere sweaters made by women, to become political. That happened, too.

MacPherson has sewn her way into an empire with the help of the company's most famous collection: its "Give a Damn" line, a series of sassy pullovers bearing progressive slogans that throw shade at President Donald Trump's administration. The quippy

Rachelle Hruska MacPherson's New York company offers customers a progressive calling card – at a price.
PROVIDED BY YUMI MATSUO/LINGUA FRANCA NYC

offerings, styled in lowercase lettering, include "melt ICE," "i like my ICE crushed" and "impeach him."

In recent years, MacPherson's company has grown beyond its political roots. Lingua Franca launched ready-to-wear in 2020, and the brand boasts a 10,000-square-foot workshop in New York City's Garment District. The bulk of the company's sales come from customizable sweaters. But Lingua Franca, founded in September 2016, two months before Trump won his first term, has experienced a homecoming as brands reckon with politics during his second term.

"We've kind of tamped down the politics as we've grown, but obviously this is the 250th year of our country, and I think a lot of things were happening and so it felt natural," MacPherson, 43, told USA TODAY.

Winfrey, the talk show mogul, and

See SWEATERS, Page 3A

Melania Trump reunites families

More Ukrainian and Russian kids are helped

Saman Shafiq
USA TODAY

First lady Melania Trump facilitated the reunion of a fifth group of Ukrainian and Russian children with their loved ones, "continuing her humanitarian work on behalf of those affected by the war," her office said.

Five children were reunited with their families, marking a milestone "step toward ensuring that innocent kids can safely return to their homes, communities, and the people who care for them," the first lady's office said in a statement Thursday, July 30.

"While diplomacy and peacebuilding are important to this effort, they are surpassed by our collective ability to place children above international disputes," Melania Trump's statement reads. "Every reunion is a reminder that compassion, dignity, and family can transcend even the darkest of times: war."

First lady Melania Trump helped to reunite a fifth group of Ukrainian and Russian children with their families, her office announced. GETTY IMAGES

The first lady said she and her representatives will "continue working with the governments of Russia and Ukraine to safely return children to their families and communities."

Melania Trump's letter to Putin

Melania Trump first raised the plight of children in a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, which President Donald Trump delivered to Putin at their summit last August in Alaska. A ceasefire deal on Russia's war with Ukraine was not agreed upon.

The first lady, in her letter, emphasized "it is time" to protect children and future generations around the globe, USA TODAY reported.

"We must strive to paint a dignity-filled world for all – so that every soul may wake to peace, and so that the future itself is perfectly guarded," the first lady wrote. "A simple yet profound concept, Mr. Putin, as I am sure you agree, is that each generation's descendants begin their lives with a purity – an innocence which stands above geography, government, and ideology."

The letter made no specific reference to Ukraine or the tens of thousands of Ukrainian children who have been removed from Ukraine and Russian-occupied territory and taken to Russia.

"In today's world, some children are forced to carry a quiet laughter, untouched by the darkness around them – a silent defiance against the forces that can potentially claim their future," the letter said.

First set of children returned to Ukraine in October 2025

Melania Trump's efforts first bore fruit in October 2025 when Putin's government agreed to return Ukrainian children who were taken to Russia as minors and have since turned 18.

Trump said she aimed to facilitate reunifications of children with their families until every child is returned home. "This is an important initiative for me," Trump said. "It is built on shared purpose and lasting impact."

Contributing: Sarah D. Wire and Francesca Chambers

Ukraine not concerned about a wider Middle East conflict

Envoy tells USA TODAY 'trying to survive' is key

Francesca Chambers and Michael Collins
USA TODAY

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy listens to President Donald Trump and European leaders at the White House in 2025. ALEXANDER DRAGO/REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Ukraine's ambassador to the United States insisted that leaders in Kyiv are not playing "a game of chess" with their recent drone strike on an Iranian ship and have no interest in leveraging their conflict with Russia into a wider, global war in the Middle East.

"My president cares only about stopping the war in my country," Ambassador Olga Stefanishyna said during in a brief interview with USA TODAY after an event in Washington on July 30.

"People are dying – this is what we care about," she said, her voice filling with emotion. "We're not connecting any wars. We're not building any policy behind that. And we are just trying to survive, go through the winter and make the war stop."

The ambassador's remarks came days after Ukraine used drones to strike an Iranian cargo ship in the Caspian Sea on July 25, killing a civilian sailor. Kyiv accused the vessel of ferrying military equipment between Iran and Russia. The strike preceded a trip by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington to meet with President Donald Trump and attend the funeral of Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina and one of Congress' most vocal supporters of Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

The friction between Iran and Ukraine prompted accusations that Zelenskyy is trying to draw the United States and Russia into a singular conflict that Trump and the West are unable to ignore.

Iranian foreign minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi called Ukraine's attack "a blatant UN Charter violation done at Israel's behest to drag Europe into its war."

Ebrahim Azizi, who serves as head of the Iranian parliament's National Security Commission, said Iran would retaliate.

"Any attack on Iran always comes with a cost; the U.S. and Israel are well aware of this," Azizi wrote on X. "Ukraine, too, may soon come to understand that Iran does not let actions go unanswered."

Zelenskyy, meanwhile, promised that he'd be sharing intelligence with Ukraine's military partners "regarding Russia's new assistance to the Iranian regime." He accused Russia of sharing its satellite surveillance of U.S. military facilities in several Gulf states with Iran.

"There is a clear correlation between Russia's satellite imagery of these sites and Iranian strikes – both before the attacks, in preparation for them, and afterward, to assess the damage inflicted," Zelenskyy wrote in a social media post. "The purpose is clear."

Trump had denied a day earlier that Russia was participating in Iran's war with the United States. "If they did, it would be very bad for them – certainly not in their best interests," he wrote in a Truth Social post.

By the time Zelenskyy reached Washington, however, his government had started dialing down its rhetoric. Ukraine's foreign minister, Andrii Sybiha, said he called his Iranian counterpart, Araghchi, and urged restraint.

Zelenskyy later had an informal conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Graham's service and a formal meeting at the White House with Trump and other U.S. officials.

Stefanishyna told reporters at an event sponsored by the Christian Science Monitor on July 30 that Ukraine's only intention is to deprive Russia of the means to wage its war against her country. She called the attack on the Iranian vessel "unintentional" and said the call between Iranian and Ukrainian officials resulted in a de-escalation.

"The purpose of this … call was to send a signal that we are not willing to escalate the situation," she said of the diplomacy.

Later, when pressed on whether Ukraine initially sought to link the wars to get Trump's attention, she told USA TODAY: "We are not ever going to stop highlighting any information about anyone who serves as a strategic enabler, either Russian aggression against Ukraine or where Russia tries to become a strategic enabler for anyone who … attacks the allies of Ukraine, who provide the vital support for Ukraine."

Iran's long military relationship with Russia

Iran has had a longstanding military relationship with Russia, which has been at war with Ukraine since 2022. Tehran has sent hundreds of drones to Moscow since the start of the war with Ukraine and has provided blueprints, designs and other technology to help Russia build its own facilities to manufacture the weapons, U.S. intelligence agencies have said, according to published reports.

> **"We're not connecting any wars. We're not building any policy behind that. And we are just trying to survive, go through the winter and make the war stop."**
>
> **Olga Stefanishyna**
> Ukraine's ambassador to the United States

For its part, Russia has provided satellite imagery that Iran has used to track U.S. troops, warships and aircraft, according to published reports. U.S. intelligence agencies are reportedly investigating whether Russia provided information that aided Iranian attacks on CIA facilities in the Gulf, including a March 3 strike on the CIA station in Riyadh, Reuters reported.

Concerns that Russia could be providing targeting data to Iran intensified after strikes earlier this month on a U.S. air base in Jordan, where Iran struck army barracks with ballistic missiles, killing two soldiers, according to Reuters.

Stefanishyna said during the July 30 event that Iran's drone shipments to Russia came up during the phone call with Iran's foreign minister.

'The Iranians will respond'

Ukraine's strike against the Iranian cargo ship July 25 was a major escalation in tensions between the two countries, said Trita Parsi, a Middle East expert and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a Washington-based think tank that advocates for military restraint.

Parsi spoke to analysts with ties to the Iranian government who told him that, for Iran, the tension over Ukraine's attack on the ship is not over.

"The Iranians will respond to this," Parsi said. "The question is when and how."

Iran's response could come after its war with the United States has been resolved or at least de-escalated, Parsi said analysts told him. "If it's done afterwards, it reduces the risk that an Iranian response actually contributes to the merging of the two theaters," Parsi said.

There had been circumstantial evidence that Zelenskyy was looking to merge his country's war with the United States' conflict with Iran, Parsi added.

From the beginning, Ukraine has been trying to draw the United States more deeply into its war with Russia – not only through U.S. support and weaponry but also through military operations, Parsi said. At a minimum, he said, the Ukrainians have been tempted to help the United States by providing drone technology and other resources "in a manner that would bring the U.S. into the Ukrainian war in a deeper way."

"That, in and of itself, would be the beginning of the merging of the two wars," he said.

Fusing the two wars would be a risky move that could lead to global conflict, Parsi said. U.S. personnel, intelligence assets, logistics, and operational planning would become increasingly intertwined across the two theaters. European governments would be forced into taking sides in the conflict because of their commitments to Ukraine. And Iran's allies in the Middle East would likely come to its defense.

The result, he said, could be a war that spans three continents – Europe, Asia and even Africa, because of the Red Sea's strategic importance between Asia and Africa.

Others don't seen a global war.

Even with Iran's ties to Russia and Ukraine's alliance with the United States, both sides have good reason to avoid opening another front, said Neil Quilliam, a Middle East expert at Chatham House, a London-based policy institute that analyzes international affairs.

"Ukraine's priority remains Russia, while Iran is already managing multiple security challenges and has little incentive to become directly involved in a separate conflict with Ukraine," Quilliam said.

The more likely scenario, he said, is Ukraine continuing to strike ships it believes are helping Russia. Ukraine would gain little from a full-scale confrontation with Iran, he added.

"A direct confrontation with Iran would stretch Ukraine's resources and distract attention from its primary objective, which remains the war with Russia," he said. "The greater benefit comes from highlighting links between Russia and Iran rather than fighting Iran itself.

Zelenskyy is trying to persuade the Trump administration that the war in Ukraine is not a European issue but part of a larger threat facing the West. "By drawing attention to Russian-Iranian cooperation," Quilliam said, "he strengthens the argument that support for Ukraine also serves wider U.S. interests."

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Threat

Continued from Page 1A

sheer volume in the number of idle vessels – and their global routes – is especially concerning to researchers.

Taken together, the conditions have laid the groundwork for what scientists describe as an "immense international biosecurity threat."

Will Cruz uses a powerwasher to remove barnacles and other growth from the hull of a sailboat just removed from the water in Marion, Massachusetts, in 2024. The United States in general is at a lower risk of invasive organisms coming out of the Strait of Hormuz because of distance and our lower salinity levels. PETER PEREIRA/USA TODAY NETWORK

The environmental and economic costs of idling ships

The buildup of marine organisms on vessels, referred to as biofouling, can cause a wide array of problems not only for marine ecosystems but also for global shipping companies.

The growth can lead ships to have more drag as they move through the water, burning extra fuel and increasing exhaust emissions. According to the International Maritime Organization, biofouling wastes about 10% of all fuel used by the world's shipping fleets. That has led operators to spend billions of dollars a year to mitigate the problem, using specialized coatings on the bottom of ships and specialized cleaning operations.

There are dozens of examples of invasive marine species hitchhiking on ships and threatening ecosystems around the globe.

One example the researchers highlight is the invasion of the Australasian barnacle Austrominius modestus to Western Europe during World War II. That invasion, which saw the new barnacle outcompete other native species, was linked to New Zealand ships being held in English ports while awaiting convoy escorts.

In the United States, the rope grass hydroid Garveia fransiscana was introduced to the Chesapeake Bay by commercial ships about a century ago. Since then, the organism, which is native to the Indo-Pacific, has caused major problems for infrastructure, mainly by clogging power plants' cooling systems, Tamburri said.

"We've been working with a nuclear power plant locally to control and manage that fouling," he said. "It's costing millions of dollars per year to keep those cooling systems clear – and there's lots of incidents like that."

There's also the potential for harm to marine life and humans.

Tamburri said there are diseases that infect things like shellfish that are suspected to have traveled along the hulls of ships. In the early 1990s, the pathogen Vibrio cholerae, which causes cholera, was discovered on five ships docked in U.S. ports along the Gulf of Mexico. Those ships had come from Latin America, which at the time was grappling with an outbreak of cholera.

After the discovery, the Food and Drug Administration recommended that the U.S. Coast Guard issue an advisory to shipping agents and captains requesting that ballast waters be exchanged on the high seas before ships entered U.S. ports.

Is the United States at risk?

There are several aspects to the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz that make it unprecedented, at least in modern history, Tamburri said.

The sheer number of ships – study authors cite at least 1,500 vessels – idled near the trade route and the length of time involved are just the beginning.

Tamburri said organisms that thrive in the Middle East waters, such as the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf, are adaptable and especially resilient as the waters experience extreme seasonal changes. The Gulf, for example, can reach 95 degrees in the summer and 60 degrees in the winter.

"Those organisms can withstand extremes," Tamburri said. "They're tolerant organisms, which makes them good candidates for invasions when they go to a new location."

The areas most at risk are those nearby with similar conditions, such as high salinity and high temperatures. Southeast Asia and ports across India are at greater risk than most other locations, Tamburri said, especially international hubs for commercial shipping like Singapore.

The United States and North America in general are at a lower risk because of their distance and lower levels of salinity, Tamburri said.

"They're not at zero risk by any means," he said, adding that ports along the Gulf Coast are of particular concern because of their relatively high temperatures.

What can be done now?

Researchers recommend that operators and shipping companies conduct in-water cleanings to remove some of the buildup, citing the risk to ecosystems globally and the higher fuel costs.

But that scenario is unlikely for most ships "given the urgency of evacuating stranded seafarers and restoring shipping movements," the study says. The researchers also cite limited capacity and constraints to operations aimed at cleaning hundreds of large commercial vessels.

Ports also aren't expected to have the resources to conduct large-scale cleaning operations and will likely prioritize clearing bottlenecks, the study says.

Given these challenges, the researchers recommend that crews estimate the buildup of marine organisms before departing so authorities can evaluate risks. They also recommend that nearby ports monitor for early detection using low-cost, rapid assessments.

The researchers also call for governments, the maritime industry and others to strengthen biofouling management. "While the human and economic consequences of events like the war in the Middle East will always remain the highest priority, ecological impacts cannot be overlooked," the study says.

Looking ahead, Tamburri said, the risks from biofouling are expected to only increase as climate change leads to warmer ocean temperatures.

"There could be areas where native organisms are on the edge of what they can tolerate because they're not adapted to warmer waters," he said. "Now perhaps these invaders have a better chance of colonizing and outcompeting the native species."

Sweaters

Continued from Page 1A

media maven Stewart have been photographed in the "Give a Damn" sweaters, which run from $150 to $380. Screen star Connie Britton was styled in the brand's black "poverty is sexist" sweater for the 2018 Golden Globes.

Company born of founder's postpartum depression

MacPherson, a Nebraska native, was raised in Lincoln and spent childhood summers on her family farm with her cousins and grandparents. After attending Pius X High School, a prestigious Catholic institution in her hometown, and Creighton University in Omaha, she moved to New York in 2005 to pursue dreams beyond the prairie.

In 2008, MacPherson cofounded Guest of a Guest, a popular lifestyle site about the gilded lives of New York's high society. She married hospitality titan Sean MacPherson in 2011, and the pair welcomed two sons, Maxwell and then Dashiell. After Dash's birth in 2016, MacPherson experienced an extreme bout of postpartum anxiety and depression.

"I was working nonstop and trying to make sense of the digital landscape when everything was changing and really kind of just sunk into a deep black hole," MacPherson said. She went to a therapist and is now medicated with Lexapro, a common antidepressant. To heal, the founder's therapist recommended that she perform manual tasks because she was often online, attached to her phone and plugged into the constant news cycle.

On a visit to Montauk, a luxe hamlet in the Hamptons where her family vacations, MacPherson passed a JoAnn Fabrics store. Her paternal grandmother, Rita, had taught her how to embroider at the family farm.

"We used to spend summers there with my cousins, and I just remember it being one of my happiest times in my life," MacPherson said. She hadn't stitched in 20 years but went into the store to purchase needles and thread.

Janet MacPherson, the mother-in-law of Rachelle Hruska MacPherson, wears Lingua Franca's "outlaw" sweater.
PROVIDED BY LINGUA FRANCA NYC

Lingua Franca's first line was an apolitical line of 2,000 sweaters sold by Net-a-Porter, the luxury fashion site. MacPherson designed a collection inspired by her "muse" and mother-in-law, Janet MacPherson, a pioneer in women's surfing. MacPherson, who rode waves into her 80s, dons a Lingua Franca "outlaw" sweater in the photo that accompanies her New York Times obituary.

'We want to feel inclusive'

After Trump was elected, MacPherson took a photo of her ode to Barack Obama on an embroidered sweater and posted the photo to Instagram. "It went totally viral," MacPherson wrote in a Business Insider essay. The garment was a gift for Anna Carter, who runs a digital telegram company along with her husband, former Vanity Fair editor Graydon Carter.

The brand's celebrity fans include Candice Bergen, Jamie Lee Curtis, Katie Couric, Andy Cohen, America Ferrera, Reese Witherspoon, Jane Fonda, Laura Dern and Lupita Nyong'o.

Lingua Franca has also triggered high-profile backlash. MacPherson drew criticism for the company's anti-ICE sweaters. A retailer dropped her brand in the wake of that controversy.

But the most outspoken critics of MacPherson's line are disgruntled about the sweaters' cost. In 2018, she told The Hollywood Reporter that "the biggest criticism we get is the price point." In an interview with USA TODAY, she addressed the question again.

MacPherson recalled her own experience as a Midwesterner adjusting to East Coast prices. When her cousins from Kansas City, Missouri, came to visit recently, she took them to Montauk and brought them to the high-end market, Round Swamp Farm.

The Hamptons hot spot is beloved by culinary icon Ina Garten and hated by Bethenny Frankel after the former "Real Housewives of New York" star said the store didn't give her credit for helping make it famous. The cost of goods is relative, MacPherson said, but added that it's important to acknowledge and explain what people are paying for.

"It's something that is the biggest challenge because we want to feel inclusive," MacPherson said. "We want to bring people into our community and our conversation. We also want to both maintain our quality, the dignity of the workers that work for us who all have full benefits and salaried positions … and so it's hard to do that."

Lingua Franca has totaled nearly $2 million in charitable giving, and its factories in Portugal and Peru are prescreened for best practices, MacPherson said. The clothing company partnered with NPR and PBS after public media saw $1 billion in funding cuts last year amid pressure from congressional Republicans and the Trump administration.

Are Lingua Franca's clothes 'outrageously priced' or fair?

The pricing is relative because of the products' ethically sourced, hand-stitched domestic production, said Lori Poloni-Staudinger, an expert on the politics of fashion.

Poloni-Staudinger, who is also dean of the University of Arizona's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, added, "I don't think it's, like, outrageously priced," but said she wouldn't be likely to purchase a sweater at that rate.

The "Give a Damn" collection is an elevated political T-shirt, according to Karen Kedrowski, an Iowa State professor who explores the intersection of fashion and politics. Kedrowski said the sweaters have filled a niche by communicating a political statement with the "pleasure point" and seasonality of cashmere. "It does send sort of multilayered messages, both about politics, but then also about personal status as well," Kedrowski said.

Millions of people wear T-shirts with political messaging, but MacPherson's chic use of cashmere also communicates wealth to potential customers, Kedrowski said. MacPherson said she hears from customers who have passed down sweaters to their daughters, something she appreciates given the throwaway nature of fashion.

Other companies have found success by producing political garb. T-shirts by Raygun, a clothing company based in Des Moines, boast locations across the Midwest such as Chicago; MacPherson's hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska; Kansas City; and Madison, Wisconsin.

Raygun's shirts, which feature slogans like "AMERICA NEEDS LESBIAN FARMERS," are ethically made and typically retail for less than $30. Trump fans favor his red "Make America Great Again" hats, which are available online at his official store for $55.

In New York, MacPherson wants to continue building a community for Lingua Franca fans who can't afford the company's products – at the company's West Village retail store, on social media and on her popular Substack newsletter, Loose Threads.

MacPherson wants something more: to build a timeless brand that extends beyond the politics of "Give a Damn."

A western Michigan school district barred students from wearing hoodies such as this ones, which spurred a federal lawsuit alleging the students' free speech rights were denied. PROVIDED BY U.S. DISTRICT COURT

Students seeking justices' opinion on 'Let's Go Brandon'

Is phrase lewd or an example of free speech?

Maureen Groppe
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – When two Michigan students wore "Let's Go Brandon" sweatshirts to middle school in 2022, they knew what the phrase – which had gone viral as a euphemism for a vulgar criticism of President Joe Biden – stood for.

So did the school officials in the rural community of Howard City who told the brothers to change, citing rules prohibiting clothing with indecent messages.

When the students and their mother sued, lower courts said their constitutional free-speech rights were not violated.

Now the family hopes the Supreme Court will take their case and rule that schools can't censor political messages that are not "plainly profane or lewd."

A 'staple of political discourse'

"'Let's Go Brandon' is not profane. It is not lewd. It is not a sexual double entendre," lawyers for the students wrote in their appeal. "It is a staple of political discourse and debate over the last four years used everywhere from the floor of Congress to television roundtables and the campaign trail."

"The number of lewd and vulgar codewords is shockingly expansive and ever-changing."

Lisa Blatt
Lawyer for the Tri County Area Schools

Critics of Biden adopted the slogan after a reporter mischaracterized a profane phrase hostile to Biden that was shouted at a NASCAR race in 2021.

The brothers suing Tri County Area Schools in western Michigan received sweatshirts emblazoned with the phrase as a Christmas present from their mother that year.

The students – then in the sixth and eighth grades and identified in the lawsuit only by their initials – said in court filings they wore the sweatshirts to school to "silently express disapproval of President Biden."

But the school's dress code prohibits messages that are lewd, indecent, vulgar or profane.

An appeals court ruled in 2025 that school officials had reasonably determined the message was vulgar based on its "commonly understood meaning."

Supreme Court recently turned down other student speech cases

The Supreme Court has not shown an appetite in recent months for reviewing how schools are policing clothing with political messages.

In June, the court rejected an appeal from a Michigan student who was not allowed to wear – for her school's "Great Kindness Challenge" – a hat featuring an image of an AR-style rifle and the phrase "come and take it."

The court passed up a chance last year to decide if a Massachusetts school erred by banning a T-shirt saying, "There are only two genders."

Those cases turned on a landmark 1969 decision protecting students' First Amendment rights as long as the speech isn't too disruptive.

The "Let's Go Brandon" lawsuit tests a 1986 ruling that schools can prohibit speech that conveys an obscene or vulgar message. In that case, the Supreme Court said a school could discipline a student who used an elaborate sexual metaphor when nominating a classmate for student office during a school assembly.

That ruling put the thumb on the scale in favor of school administrators' judgment calls, according to the appeals court judges who backed Tri County Area Schools in the dispute over the sweatshirt.

"And here the uncontroverted origin of the slogan shows a plainly vulgar meaning," wrote Judge John Nalbandian, who was appointed to the Cincinnati-based 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals by President Donald Trump.

Is 'Let's Go Brandon' the equivalent of 'Where's the Beef'?

But Judge John K. Bush, who also was appointed by Trump, disagreed, saying his two colleagues who ruled for the school were being too deferential to administrators when it comes to political speech.

Bush said "Let's Go Brandon" became a "national inside joke" similar to how Wendy's 1984 ad slogan "Where's the Beef?" was co-opted to by Vice President Walter Mondale to suggest his opponent, Gary Hart, lacked substance.

" 'Let's Go Brandon!'" just cheekily expressed criticism of a president's leadership capabilities," Bush wrote in his dissent.

He said it was up to the Supreme Court to "ultimately clarify, and ideally limit," the court's 1986 ruling about suggestive speech at school.

The justices could announce whether they will hear the case – which is backed by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, or FIRE – when they return from their summer recess.

Deciding what's offensive can become 'head-spinning'

Lawyers for Tri County Area Schools encouraged the justices not to reopen that can of worms, warning that trying to figure out where to draw the line becomes "head-spinning."

"The number of lewd and vulgar codewords is shockingly expansive and ever-changing," wrote Lisa Blatt, the experienced Supreme Court warrior the school hired to fight the appeal, showing how seriously they're taking the lawsuit.

Blatt filled her filings with so many examples – more than 200 – of the kinds of phrases that judges would have to rule on that she apologized "for the use of offensive language and images."

"Almost all lewd speech comes in sanitized code, innuendo, and double meaning," she wrote. "Take the number 69. Although on its face it is just a number innocently falling between 68 and 70, many understand it to refer to a sexual position."

And what if a student wants to wear a shirt saying, "I don't know who Brandon is but duck Trump"?

The fact that some of the school bans being challenged in court are difficult cases is not a sign that the rules governing speech at school are unclear, she said. Instead, Blatt wrote, they're a "product of the entrepreneurial creativity of America's schoolchildren to invent new ways of conveying profane and lewd messages."

Father of GA school shooter sentenced to 15 years in prison

'Divisive' case makes history in state

N'dea Yancey-Bragg
USA TODAY

Days after a teenager was sentenced to life in prison for killing four people at a Georgia high school in 2024, his father was sentenced to 15 years in prison for providing the gun used in the mass shooting.

Colin Gray, 55, was convicted in March on 27 counts, including second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter, reckless conduct and cruelty to children after less than two hours of deliberations. His son Colt Gray, 16, pleaded guilty to 55 charges, including felony murder, aggravated assault and cruelty to children after the Sept. 4, 2024, shooting at Apalachee High School.

The elder Gray testified during his roughly two-week-long trial that he gave his son the rifle as a Christmas present, but had no idea he was capable of carrying out a mass shooting. "I struggle with it every day," he said during the emotional testimony.

Meanwhile, prosecutors argued that Colin Gray should have known the danger his son posed. The case was "about who armed Colt and who enabled him to do what he did," prosecutor Patricia Brooks told jurors in her closing arguments.

Colin Gray's case marked the first time in Georgia history a parent of a school shooter was charged and convicted in connection with the attack, according to both the prosecution and defense. Judge Nicholas Primm acknowledged the historic and "divisive nature of the case," before sentencing Colin Gray.

Primm said Colin Gray "failed as a parent" and that it became "more and more obvious that something bad was going to happen" in the lead up to the shooting. Still, Primm said, it was important that Gray did not actually know what his son was planning and didn't intentionally commit a crime.

"It matters that you didn't seek to harm anyone," Primm said. "It matters that you didn't pull a trigger."

Colin Gray is not the first parent in the United States to be charged in connection with a school shooting, but the charges he was convicted of and punishment he faced are more severe, thanks in part to a specific and relatively new Georgia law. The most serious charge, second-degree murder, is punishable by up to 30 years in prison in Georgia, less than murder but more than involuntary manslaughter.

While the particular charges will vary case-by-case, legal experts told USA TODAY that his conviction may encourage more prosecutors nationwide to pursue similar cases.

Tumultuous family life

During Colt Gray's sentencing hearing, multiple witnesses testified about the family's chaotic home life prior to the shooting. Forensic psychologist Kevin Richards said as the family dealt with financial issues and drug use, the teenager grew increasingly isolated, spent most of his time online and eventually joined the community that was "obsessed" with school shooters.

Candice Broce, the head of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, said the teen's parents had an "extensive history" with the agency. Broce said she recently substantiated multiple categories of child abuse and neglect allegations against both parents, including inadequate supervision, domestic violence and lack of psychological care, poisoning and failure to secure a weapon findings against Colin Gray.

During emotional testimony at Colin Gray's sentencing, family members of the victims blamed him for arming his son and asked the judge to impose the maximum sentence. Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo, both 14, and teachers Richard Aspinwall, 39, and Cristina Irimie, 53, were killed in the rampage, which shocked Winder, Georgia, northeast of Atlanta.

Colin Gray declined to speak at his sentencing, and his attorneys called no witness. Defense attorney Brian Hobbs argued that Colin Gray would have taken steps to get rid of the weapons, citing a conversation he had with law enforcement before the shooting, but Colt Gray and his mother hid the extent of his fascination with mass shooters.

Months before the shooting, Colt Gray was accused of threatening to commit a school shooting online. Officials said they could not definitively confirm the threat was made by Gray's son, but a sheriff's deputy urged Colin Gray to keep his guns locked up during a visit to their home.

Hobbs asked the judge to sentence Gray to 20 years, saying that would be comparable to punishment of Jennifer and James Crumbley, the parents of a teenager who killed four of his classmates at a Michigan high school. The Crumbleys were convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to 10 to 15 years in prison.

"We've asked the court not to make Georgia an outlier, in this first case of its kind," Hobbs said.

Meanwhile, Barrow County District Attorney Brad Smith asked the judge to sentence Colin Gray to 80 years in prison. Smith held up images and headlines related to the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that were displayed on Colt Gray's wall and said the father ignored "a substantial and unjustifiable risk."

LEGAL NOTICE

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT, DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY
The Diocese of Camden, New Jersey
Chapter 11 Reorganization Proceeding (Case No. 20-21257)
NOTICE OF HEARING ON, AND OBJECTION DEADLINE FOR, THE DEBTOR'S MOTION TO APPROVE INSURER SETTLEMENTS

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the Diocese of Camden, New Jersey ("Diocese"), the debtor in the captioned bankruptcy proceeding, case number 20-21257, in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Jersey ("Court") has entered into Settlement Agreements (collectively "Agreements") pursuant to 11 U.S.C. §§ 105(a) and 363 and Fed. R. Bankr. P. 2002(l), 6004(c), and 9019(a) with Underwriters at Lloyd's, London, and certain London Market Insurance Companies (Catalina Worthing Insurance Ltd f/k/a HFPI (as Part VII transferee of Excess Insurance Company Ltd), RiverStone Insurance (UK) Limited (as successor in interest to Terra Nova Insurance Company Ltd. and Sphere Drake Insurance PLC), Tenecom Ltd. (f/k/a Yasuda Fire & Marine Ins. Co. (UK) Ltd.), Union America Insurance Company, London & Edinburgh Insurance Company Ltd (as successor in interest to London & Edinburgh General Ins. Co. Ltd.), and Dominion Insurance Company Ltd.), Interstate Fire & Casualty Company, National Surety Corporation, and Century Indemnity Company, as successor to CCI Insurance Company, as successor to Insurance Company of North America, Insurance Company of North America, Federal Insurance Company, and Illinois Union Insurance Company (collectively, "Insurers").

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that on July 28, 2026, the Diocese filed a motion to approve the Agreements ("Motion"), at ECF 4054, in the Court. A hearing on the Motion shall commence on **August 18, 2026 at 11:00 a.m.**, before the Honorable Jerrold N. Poslusny, Jr., United States Bankruptcy Judge, at the United States Bankruptcy Court, Mitchell H. Cohen U.S. Courthouse, 400 Cooper Street, Camden, New Jersey 08101.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that if the Motion is approved, then, as described more particularly in the Agreements, the Diocese and certain non-debtor related entities (collectively with the Diocese, the "DOC Entities") will sell, and the Insurers will purchase, (a) all policies of insurance issued or allegedly issued by the Insurers to the DOC Entities, whether known or unknown at the time of the Agreements, including but not limited to those policies identified in the Agreements, along with (b) certain related Claims of the DOC Entities (collectively, and as defined in the Settlement Agreements, the "Purchased Property").

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE THAT THE DOC ENTITIES ARE SEEKING TO SETTLE AND SELL, FREE AND CLEAR OF ALL LIENS, CLAIMS, ENCUMBRANCES, AND OTHER INTERESTS, THE PURCHASED PROPERTY. THIS "FREE AND CLEAR" SALE OF THE PURCHASED PROPERTY ENTAILS CERTAIN RELEASES, INJUNCTIONS, AND OTHER PROTECTIVE PROVISIONS IN FAVOR OF THE INSURERS. AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE MOTION PROPOSES A SETTLING INSURER INJUNCTION THAT PERMANENTLY ENJOINS ALL PERSONS WHO HAVE HELD OR ASSERTED, OR MAY IN THE FUTURE HOLD OR ASSERT, ANY CLAIMS FROM TAKING ANY ACTION, DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, FOR PURPOSES OF ASSERTING, ENFORCING, OR ATTEMPTING TO ASSERT OR ENFORCE ANY BARRED CLAIM (AS DEFINED IN THE AGREEMENTS AND INCLUDING CLAIMS AGAINST THE DOC ENTITIES ARISING OUT OF SEXUAL ABUSE) AGAINST THE INSURERS, CERTAIN RELATED ENTITIES, OR THE PROPERTY OR ASSETS OF EACH. THE DOC ENTITIES ARE SEEKING TO FULLY RELEASE ANY CLAIMS AGAINST THE ABOVE-REFERENCED INSURER RELEASED PARTIES ARISING FROM OR RELATED IN ANY WAY TO THE POLICIES, INCLUDING ALL EXTRA-CONTRACTUAL CLAIMS. FURTHER, THE AGREEMENTS SPECIFY THAT THE INSURERS WILL RECEIVE THE BENEFIT OF AN INJUNCTION CHANNELING ALL CHANNELED CLAIMS (AS DEFINED IN THE AGREEMENTS), INCLUDING CLAIMS FOR SEXUAL ABUSE, TO A TRUST UNDER THE CONFIRMED PLAN, WHICH WILL ADMINISTER AND RESOLVE THE CHANNELED CLAIMS, AND THE HOLDERS OF ALL SUCH CLAIMS WILL BE BARRED FROM TAKING ANY ACTION AGAINST THE PROTECTED PARTIES OR INSURERS, INCLUDING COMMENCING OR CONTINUING AN ACTION WITH RESPECT TO ANY CHANNELED CLAIM; ENFORCING A JUDGMENT OR ORDER AGAINST THE PROTECTED PARTIES OR INSURERS WITH RESPECT TO ANY CHANNELED CLAIM; CREATING OR PERFECTING LIENS OF ANY KIND RELATING TO ANY CHANNELED CLAIM; AND ASSERTING OR IMPLEMENTING ANY CHANNELED CLAIM AGAINST ANY OF THE PROTECTED PARTIES OR INSURERS. THERE ARE ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS IN THE AGREEMENTS — BEYOND THOSE SET FORTH IN THE PRECEDING SENTENCES — WHICH SHOULD BE REVIEWED TO UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY THE AGREEMENTS AND THEIR EFFECT ON YOUR RIGHTS.

Copies of the Motion may be obtained by contacting (a) Kroll at https://cases.ra.kroll.com/camdendiocese/, camdeninfo@ra.kroll.com, or Toll-Free: (877) 465-8420; Local: (347) 817-4096; or (b) visiting the website of United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Jersey at https://www.njb.uscourts.gov/. A PACER login and password are required to access documents on the Bankruptcy Court's website and these can be obtained through the PACER Service Center at www.pacer.psc.uscourts.gov.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that any written objection to the Motion by a party other than the Diocese, the Insurers, the committees appointed in the case, and the parishes and other Catholic entities located within the territory of the Diocese must be filed and served by **August 11, 2026.** Any written response must reference case number 20-21257; state the specific facts upon which the objection is based; be filed with the Clerk of the Court; provide proof of service that a copy of the response was served on counsel for the Diocese, counsel for the Official Committee of Tort Claimant Creditors, counsel for the Official Committee of Unsecured Trade Creditors, and upon the United States Trustee; and must also conform and be served in accordance with the Local Rules for the Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Jersey.

IF YOU HAVE (1) A CLAIM AGAINST THE DOC ENTITIES AS TO WHICH INSURANCE COVERAGE IS OR MAY BE AVAILABLE, (2) AN INTEREST IN ANY OF THE DOC ENTITIES' INSURANCE POLICIES OR CERTIFICATES, OR (3) ANY CLAIMS AGAINST THE INSURERS RELATING TO THE FOREGOING, **YOUR RIGHTS MAY BE AFFECTED**.

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Dry shampoo is handy, but use it properly

Daryl Austin
USA TODAY

Dry shampoo can help users save time and eliminate the need for a shower, but the product isn't for everyone. MARINA DEMESHKO/GETTY IMAGES

Few things can derail a day faster than greasy, limp or unpleasant-smelling hair. Whether it happens after a tough workout, a long day at work, a busy travel schedule or simply because life gets in the way, most people would rather avoid dealing with hair that feels dirty.

There are plenty of ways to keep your hair looking fresh. Some people focus on preventive measures, such as limiting excessive heat styling, avoiding heavy hair products or following scalp-care routines designed to reduce oil buildup.

Others rely on more regular washing with water and traditional shampoo to remove dirt and excess oil. But in recent years, dry shampoo has emerged as an especially popular option as it is found everywhere from salons to drugstores and promises to refresh hair in minutes without requiring a trip to the shower.

Here's what dry shampoo is, who can benefit from it and how to use it more effectively.

What is dry shampoo?

Despite its name, dry shampoo is not a traditional shampoo. Those shampoos use water and cleansing ingredients called surfactants to wash away dirt, sweat, oil and product buildup from the scalp and hair, explains Angela Lamb, a dermatologist at Mount Sinai in New York City who specializes in treating skin and hair conditions.

Dry shampoo, by contrast, is a water-free product that "utilizes a powder made from different ingredients, often a clay, silica or other absorbent material, to coat the hair and absorb natural oils," she says. Dry shampoos are most commonly sold as aerosol sprays, though powder and foam versions are available.

One of the biggest misconceptions about dry shampoo is that it cleanses the scalp. Instead, "it absorbs some of the oil on the hair and scalp, improving appearance and texture temporarily," says Debra Jaliman, a board-certified medical and cosmetic dermatologist practicing in Manhattan.

She explains that it accomplishes this by binding to and removing *some* dirt, sweat, dead skin cells or product residue and can thereby help refresh hair *between* washes.

Who uses dry shampoo?

Dry shampoo can be useful for a wide range of people. "Dry shampoos are great if you want to skip a wash, are traveling and do not have access to water or for people who might not be able to get to a shower due to a disability," Lamb says.

And people whose hair becomes greasy quickly often use dry shampoo to maintain a fresher appearance between wash days. It also is popular among those who exercise frequently because it can help absorb sweat-related oil and refresh hair after workouts and before work, when a full wash is not practical.

People with color-treated hair may benefit from using dry shampoos as well since frequent washing sometimes can contribute to color fading.

Dry shampoo also can add texture and lift at the roots, making hair appear fuller and creating extra volume. "And people with very oily hair may find it useful for controlling shine," adds Jaliman. Lamb notes that it also can "be useful for hairstyles that you want to try to preserve as well."

At the same time, dry shampoo is not ideal for everyone. "It can be a challenge for people with fine or thin hair as dry shampoos can weigh hair down," Lamb notes.

People with certain hair or skin conditions should be also be mindful. This includes those who are prone to scalp irritation or anyone who already struggles with significant dandruff or scalp buildup. "And be careful if you have a diagnosis like scalp psoriasis or scalp eczema," Lamb says.

How to use dry shampoo

While simple to apply, the way you use dry shampoo can make a significant difference in how well it works. It's best to start by shaking the product thoroughly if you are using a spray formula. Next, section your hair "and apply it directly to the scalp rather than spraying it only on your hair," Jaliman says. Focus primarily on the roots and areas where oil tends to accumulate, such as the crown, hairline and part.

It also is important to apply a light, even layer rather than saturating the hair. More product does not necessarily produce better results. "Overusing dry shampoo can lead to buildup on the scalp, which may cause itching and irritation," Jaliman cautions.

After application, she says it's best to allow the product to sit for a minute or two, so the oil-absorbing ingredients can work. "Then, gently massage the product into the scalp with your fingertips or brush it through the hair to distribute it evenly," Jaliman says.

Frequency of use is another consideration. "Dry shampoo is a temporary solution between washes rather than a replacement for shampooing," Jaliman says. "But a healthy scalp requires regular cleansing with water and shampoo to remove accumulated oils and debris."

Lamb adds, pay attention to how your scalp responds to any product. "If you experience dryness, redness, irritation or itching on your scalp, or do not like how your hair feels," she says, "then stop or change the product."

Independents

Continued from Page 1A

independent voters. And 34% of the 2024 electorate identified as independent, about as many as who said they were Republicans, according to the Independent Center. Notably, independents made up more of the voting population than Democrats at 32%, the organization said.

With the midterms fewer than 100 days away, several tight races are expected as Republicans try to maintain their slim majorities to help push President Donald Trump's agenda in the House and Senate. Republicans and Democrats alike will have to appeal to independents nationwide to win.

During that time, Marvin, who can't vote in Florida's upcoming primary, will probably have to choose between U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds, a Trump-endorsed Republican, and Democrat David Jolly in what looks to be a tight race for governor of the Sunshine State.

In Texas, Hebley's general election vote could determine a close U.S. Senate contest between Democratic state Rep. James Talarico and Republican and Trump ally Ken Paxton. Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, Geller will be factoring in the impact of her vote in Senate and House races on which party – and more pertinent, which agenda – holds power in Congress.

Independents have become the ultimate swing voters, Opdycke said. If they can't collectively agree on a viable third-party candidate to support, they will be looking intently for one who best backs their views.

"I think that the problem with swinging is, it's so binary in America. Like, your options are really limited to 'Do I do this, or do I do that?' " Opdycke said. "So you find independents kind of going back and forth because they look at, 'Oh my God, the Democrats are screwing up. How do I send them a message? Well, I vote Republican. Oh, the Republicans just screwed the pooch. What do I do? Well, I have to vote Democrat.'

"It's not a perfect way to make yourself heard. But in America it's kind of like the only way right now."

Sophie Gelling, 27, is an independent voter in Pennsylvania who advocates for open primaries. She believes that every registered voter, no matter their political party, should be allowed to vote. PROVIDED BY SOPHIE GELLING

> **"I'm worried the state will send National Guard troops or ICE agents to try to intimidate voters, but I'm not going to let that stop me from trying to help them. I want to make sure everyone has a chance to vote."**
>
> **Sandi Hebley**
> Independent voter in Texas

Longtime independent voter John Marvin of St. Petersburg, Florida, feels his state should hold open election primaries for all political parties as they've become even more important for voters seeking to exercise their rights during such politically divisive times. PROVIDED BY JOHN MARVIN

Independent voter feels 'like an outsider' in Florida

November can't come quickly enough for John Marvin, who hates the idea of sitting on the sidelines for any election, even if the names on the ballot don't exactly appeal to him.

But the married father of two adult children who lives in St. Petersburg, Florida, is opting to do just that because his deep-red state's Aug. 18 primary uses a closed primary system in which only registered members of a political party are permitted to vote.

And Marvin, who speaks readily about his desire for open primaries, has no interest in becoming a Republican or a Democrat. He feels, however, that primaries have become more crucial in such politically polarizing times.

"My tax dollars pay for these elections," the recently retired education administrator said. "I feel like I'm an outsider looking in. I have a constitutional right to make my voice heard, and I shouldn't be forced to associate with either of those parties in one of the most consequential midterm elections of this century.

"I believe [independents] now represent the plurality of the American electorate, but we're still being squeezed out of the process" by party-based primaries, he said.

Marvin, 63, said he has considered himself an independent for most of his adult life, as he "never felt particularly comfortable" with either major political party. He has voted for candidates from both parties, choosing ones he thinks have the best interests of all Americans at heart.

"I just don't like the constant fighting," said Marvin, his voice rising. "I get so befuddled when the debates become shouting matches on even the simplest of issues to the point where nothing gets done. It's so frustrating. So much time and money are being wasted."

When he moved to Florida from Massachusetts more than 20 years ago for a job, Marvin said it felt more like "a purple state." Now he thinks it has become "staunchly red," led by the current GOP governor and former presidential candidate Ron DeSantis. Florida's secretary of state and attorney general are Republicans, and the party holds the majority in both chambers of the state Legislature.

Although not personally a fan of DeSantis, Marvin acknowledges the governor's popularity across the state and his ability to get the big things done.

"He's been pretty effective on hurricane response and balancing the state budget, and I guess that has a trickle-down effect on voting for Republicans," Marvin said. "With him now being term-limited, I wonder if Florida just might be more open to a Democratic governor or someone more willing to work across party lines?"

Though he acknowledges DeSantis has found some common ground with Democrats on the environment and disaster relief, Marvin hasn't been crazy about the governor's divisive stances on education and immigration, or his aggressive push to redistrict congressional maps to favor Republicans.

He doesn't like that DeSantis quietly passed a law eliminating ranked-choice voting and that Florida passed a Republican-backed law last year that places severe new restrictions on ballot initiatives.

Several groups filed suit and challenged the law, arguing it violates First Amendment rights. After a two-month trial, a federal judge in April sided with the state against those groups seeking to amend Florida's constitution.

Despite his concerns, Marvin said he's not going to relocate. He is determined to make his vote and others' votes count. He is keeping a very close eye on the primary race for governor to see which Republican candidate, the Trump-endorsed Donalds or Lt. Gov. Jay Collins, emerges; and which Democratic candidate, including front-runner Jolly, the former GOP lawmaker, will prevail against five other challengers.

Marvin also has an eye on Florida's key Senate primary, and will be watching to see if GOP incumbent Ashley Moody has an edge over three other candidates and who will fare best in the Democratic race between Alexander Vindman, the former National Security Council director for European affairs, and Florida state Rep. Angie Moore.

He plans to be heavily engaged for November's general election.

"I'm going to look at all of the players and races carefully, with a fine-tooth comb," Marvin said. "And now that I'm retired, I'm going to look at them even more intensely and serve as a conduit of sorts for others who may not know the issues."

77-year-old voter is unaffiliated and unwavering in Texas

As a longtime independent voter, Sandi Hebley can't recall if she has ever voted a straight ballot for one political party. She said it's not in her DNA.

"I've always prided myself in making my own decisions," said the 77-year-old retired hospice nurse from Dallas. "It's not unusual for me to vote for a Democrat, a Republican and an independent all on the same ballot.

"I tend to think that I'm voting for the best candidate. Regardless of their affiliation."

Hebley remembers voting in 1980 for presidential long shot John Anderson, a GOP congressman from Illinois who fled his party to run as an independent against incumbent Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican challenger Ronald Reagan.

She thought Anderson, a World War II veteran and 10-term congressman who was among the first GOP lawmakers to call for President Richard Nixon's resignation when the Watergate scandal widened, became more moderate with his views.

Hebley liked how Anderson, who finished a distant third with 7% of the vote, took on both candidates and thought the two-party political system was broken. "To this day, I've never felt like I wasted my vote. I went with my gut; I always do," Hebley said.

Now, the married mother of two adult children has to make another choice as her vote could help tip the balance in a clash between upstart Democrat Talarico, 37, and Republican Paxton, 63, over which party will control the U.S. Senate.

Tipping her hand, Hebley said she's "leaning" toward Talarico and his messages about lowering the cost of living, making health care more affordable, boosting school funding and raising the minimum wage. She doesn't care for Paxton, the Texas attorney general who was indicted and impeached on securities fraud charges but not convicted. She is eager to see whether the highly polarized candidates will agree to debate, a face-off that would draw national attention.

She's also still upset with Gov. Greg Abbott's controversial decision last year to redraw the state's congressional map after Trump urged Texas Republicans to flip five U.S. House seats ahead of the midterms. The new map was signed into law, and the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the newly redrawn districts in April.

The GOP move in Texas sparked similar redistricting actions from both parties in other states. "I think a lot is on the line – again," Hebley sighs. "The future of our country is at stake."

Hebley is unwavering in her determination to ensure voting rights are protected. In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, she became a poll worker in Dallas County, figuring she could assist voters who were afraid to cast their ballot, and provide some infection control as a nurse in the process.

Now she's worried voters may be scared of something else preventing them from voting.

"I'm worried the state will send National Guard troops or ICE agents to try to intimidate voters, but I'm not going to let that stop me from trying to help them," Hebley said. "I want to make sure everyone has a chance to vote."

That also includes possibly voting for Mike Collier, who is running as an independent candidate for Texas lieutenant governor after losing campaigns for the post in 2018 and 2022 when he ran as a Democrat. The problem is Collier needs to get more than 81,000 signatures to get his name on the ballot in November. Collier has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the state's ballot access laws, arguing they violate the constitutional rights of independent candidates and voters. A decision is pending.

"I think there are more obstacles to voting, to run for office, than I've ever seen before," Hebley said. "There's always a fight."

Hebley is also proud to say she's a member of the League of Women Voters and Braver Angels, the nonpartisan nonprofit that hosts cross-party discussions, debates and workshops to promote political depolarization between conservative and liberal voters.

Though she has helped people register to vote for decades, Hebley said she's struggling with the fact that she hasn't been able to persuade one special person, her 21-year-old eldest grandson, to exercise his right to vote.

"I'm heartbroken. It's so sad," Hebley said, her voice trailing off a bit. "He said: 'Don't even talk to me about it. [The candidates] are all crooks.' I told him they all aren't and that it might be better to have a say on which crook is worse than the other. I've tried to let that simmer in his brain.

"He's a good young man, and I think he will come around," Hebley concluded. "It may not happen [in November], but I've planted the seed, and hopefully it will germinate. Every vote counts."

Fighting not to be 'shut out'

Sophie Gelling grew up in a family of independent voters in West Chester, Pennsylvania, about 25 miles west of Philadelphia.

Yet, she registered as a Democrat when she voted and served as a poll worker in her hometown during her first election in 2016. However, Gelling noticed that not everyone was allowed to vote. She felt awful turning away independent voters who were unaware of the state's closed primary system.

The memory stayed with her. Fast-forward almost 10 years, and Gelling, who lives in Philadelphia, is now a registered independent voter fighting for open primaries. She's inspired that two states, Nebraska and New Mexico, changed their primary systems to allow all registered voters to participate in the past year. Meanwhile, 17 other states have closed or partially closed primaries.

"I decided that it was important for me to be an outspoken advocate for voter independence," said Gelling, 27. The owner of a small events-organizing business called All I Want, Gelling noted she's among a record 56% of Gen Z adults Gallup says identify politically as independents or unaffiliated with either major party.

The Independent Center, the Washington, DC-based voter advocacy nonprofit, landed on a similar finding: 52% of Gen Z and millennials identify as politically independent. Only 7% of younger independent voters say they're locked into voting for a major party, compared with 67% of older voters, the center found.

Gelling said that shows "a genuine dissatisfaction" with the more traditional "hard line" two-party system she thinks is stuck in its ways. In July, Trump refused to sign a landmark affordable housing bill, complaining that Congress has not taken action to overhaul elections under the SAVE America Act.

"Being an independent to me means progress even though there are lines we need to work within to change rules for those who still feel locked out," said Gelling, who became an independent in 2025. "It's a civil rights issue – a voting rights issue."

But independent voters face many challenges beyond being seen, heard and having their votes count, said Anthony Fowler, a political science professor at the University of Chicago.

Fowler, who specializes in political polarization, said one growing challenge is that the major parties have now become more nationalized, offering more consistently polarized platforms in local elections and races across districts and states.

"But moderates and independent voters are more influential on elections than they realize," Fowler said. "Instead of blind party loyalty, they are highly swayed by the qualities of a particular candidate's ideologies and willing to switch their votes between parties."

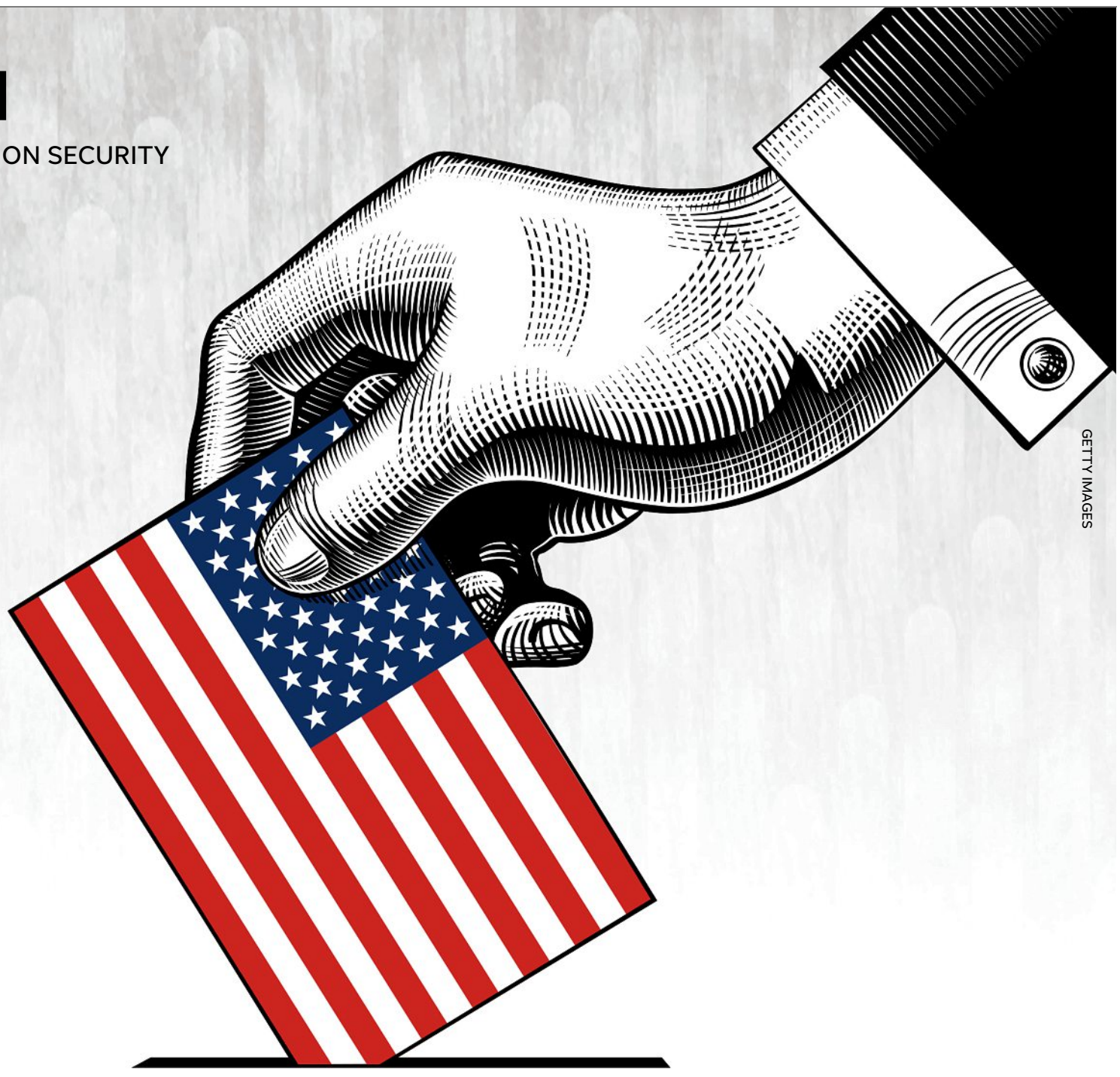
Gelling believes that every registered voter, no matter their political party, should be allowed to vote. That's one reason she organized a demonstration calling for open primaries near a polling site at the Community College of Philadelphia on May 19, Pennsylvania's primary day. She believes independent voters will have a vital role in determining outcomes in November, ranging from the governors' races to Senate and House contests that could change the power structure in Congress.

"I feel very lucky to have a very robust, independent-minded community in a purple state," Gelling said. "Independents paving the way for more people to vote is what brought me in and what will keep me here.

"The system can't shut us all out."

FORUM

YOUR SAY ELECTION SECURITY



GETTY IMAGES

Our election security is fine. Billionaires buying elections isn't.

Odd how the fraud is only there when Democrats win

It's odd that, according to President Donald Trump, when he wins, everything is above board, but when he loses, cheating is involved. What a joke! Somehow, only Democrats who get elected cheated, but all the Republicans who got elected in the same election were legal. I think he's giving Democrats way too much credit for having the ability to engineer such a feat. Wake up, America, before your country and rights are taken from you.

I believe that everything, for the most part, is accurate in our elections. There could be some minor discrepancies in a few states, but nothing significant enough to swing an election.

Isn't it odd that no other politician from either party has ever made such claims all these years? Trump is the only candidate in my lifetime (74 years) who continually whines, cries and complains about elections. Sad, so sad.

Republicans have historically been all about states' rights and reining in the federal government. Why the change with the SAVE America Act? Something stinks to me. I have some concerns about foreign actors in our elections. The irony is, for all of Trump's whining about elections, in my opinion, if any candidate has been helped by a foreign government, it is him!

I think in general, things are fine with our elections. Leave well enough alone.

— *Jim Reeves, Indiana*

Let's move to voting online already

I am not worried about election security. The small number of potential errors is not significant. If I can trust my credit card online, I can trust this. What would improve America's elections and voting process? Universal online voting. If we can trust our IRS information online, we should be able to trust voting.

— *Brian Borg, Florida*

We can improve voting in America – just not this way

In 59 of 60 court cases alleging voter fraud, the Trump supporters lost. His own departments have said that there is no widespread fraud. Only tiny numbers are found to be fraudulent or incorrect in some manner. But widespread fraud? Not a chance.

If there is "rampant" fraud, where is the evidence? Show me the proof. At the present time, there simply isn't any.

First, the Constitution clearly states that elections are to be managed by the states. Second, if there is potential for inaccuracies, it becomes much greater with the huge national numbers. The issue in New Jersey is a case in point – if there is one "software glitch," better that it affects just one state than the whole country. Third – and most important – the SAVE America Act is unnecessary and would do little more than disenfranchise millions of legally qualified voters.

Personally, I have trouble standing for long periods of time, so I vote by mail. I have not missed voting in an election for decades. If I had to vote in person, that could change. Changing the rules on voting by mail is just wrong. I have no problem requiring appropriate identification the first time someone registers to vote. After that, it's a redundant and unnecessary exercise.

I think the most urgent need is more education for voters. It should be easier for voters to find the specific policies the candidates support in order to evaluate how closely they align with the voters' priorities. Every candidate should be required to answer a specific set of questions that pertain to the office they are seeking. And the information should be readily available to any voter who is looking for answers.

— *Sharry Natoli, Florida*

Real threats to elections are ICE at the polls and postal interference

I have faith in our election results 100%. I also strongly support mail-in voting.

At this point, I'm deeply concerned about Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents involved at our voting centers and postal problems delivering our vote (on purpose).

I'm also worried about election deniers handling the tabulations.

As for foreign actors, I doubt they could manipulate the actual voting, but China and Russia have provided plenty of propaganda and misinformation on social media.

— *David Barber, Arizona*

Want secure elections? Don't let billionaires buy them.

When it comes to election integrity, I am more worried about the amount of money corporations and billionaires are throwing at the elections than voter "fraud."

As voters, we need to educate ourselves on the candidates and not fall for propaganda wherever it originates.

— *Beth Bostwick, Tennessee*

Look to Utah for Republicans upholding election integrity

The president is a poor loser and cannot fathom that his policies or actions in 2020 could result in the voting public choosing someone other than him. While he had a tremendous amount of support in that election, his challenger attracted even more support, in part, because the public was tired of the behavior of the sitting president and his poor COVID-19 response efforts.

I do think that outside, foreign actors will try to manipulate U.S. elections, but whatever risk they pose is less concerning at this time than having the current administration gain access to U.S. elections at the federal level. I have yet to see any evidence that suggests the states are not running fair and honest elections.

Republican Utah Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson is a great example of a state official who has upheld the integrity of the election process at the state level, in spite of unfounded claims to the contrary and a fair amount of political pressure. We need more state leaders like Henderson.

We need to continue to point out how effective and trustworthy our election processes are. The rhetoric from the president and some of his supporters is problematic because it casts doubts on a successful and time-honored tradition of exercising our right to vote. If our country could survive the uncertainty of the presidential election of 2000 (Florida and the hanging chads), there is nothing in recent elections that suggests the system isn't working properly.

The president needs to stop revisiting an issue that has been decided, and he and his supporters need to stop casting doubt on our system. Fox News, which had to pay $787 million to settle a defamation lawsuit from Dominion Voting Systems, paid a price for perpetuating falsehoods without credible evidence.

That's the greatest risk to our elections and voting process.

— *John Kowalewski, Minnesota*

Let's get rid of gerrymandering first

The timing of Trump's SAVE Act is suspect, being soon before the November midterm elections and combined with the extreme gerrymandering of voting districts. I am against it at this time. We need an overhaul nationwide that removes gerrymandering first. That should be the highest priority. Pass a law that eliminates gerrymandering, removes the electoral college, shortens the election cycle, and sets term limits on Supreme Court justices.

— *Kevin Stevenson, Florida*

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You can check the headlines from your home state or city

We survey and compile the top news stories from all 50 states plus Washington, DC. **Page 3B**

A woman walks along the sidewalk in the Little Haiti neighborhood of Brooklyn, as the area braces for possible immigration enforcement actions on Haitian Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, in New York City.
SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS

Immigration looms large over economy

Trump's crackdown could hurt expansion

Jessica Guynn
USA TODAY

For years, employers from Florida to Ohio have relied on immigrants taking part in a humanitarian program to staff hard-to-fill job openings for construction workers and home health aides.

Now, they warn, the Trump administration's sweeping crackdown on immigration is threatening that labor pool.

More than 300,000 Haitian migrants are set to lose their Temporary Protected Status that allows them to live and work in the United States.

The Supreme Court last month cleared the way for Haitians who sought sanctuary in the United States after natural disasters and political unrest in the Caribbean island nation to lose that protection. The ruling also covers about 6,000 people from Syria, which endured a devastating civil war from 2011 to 2024.

Immigration rights groups expect the Trump administration will also end TPS for immigrants from other countries.

"The T in TPS stands for temporary," James Percival, general counsel of the Department of Homeland Security, said last month on Fox News. "It is closing time. You don't have to go home but you can't stay here."

President Donald Trump in the Oval Office at the White House on July 24.
EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

Businesses brace for TPS impact

Trump's reforms worry Mark Zandi. The chief economist at Moody's Analytics says immigrants are a key ingredient in the American economy's "secret sauce."

More workers filling jobs and spending money spurs economic expansion, creating more jobs.

"The highly restrictive immigration policies are a significant headwind to economic growth and a tailwind to the uncomfortably high inflation," Zandi said. "Many industries are struggling to replace immigrant workers who are leaving the workforce, most notably agriculture, construction, manufacturing, transportation, leisure and hospitality and personal services. This is limiting the ability of these industries to expand and raising their costs and thus inflation."

The potential loss of workers in key industries has set off alarm bells in the business community. Trade groups have mobilized, warning of looming economic disruptions in industries already facing chronic labor shortages.

Some 830,000 TPS recipients are part of the U.S. labor force, principally in construction, retail and wholesale, leisure and hospitality, transportation and business services, according to a recent estimate from pro-immigration think tank Fwd.us.

The sudden loss of Haitian-born workers would be "especially acute" in health care and caregiving occupations and could affect "the delivery of care and other essential services" in nursing homes and other facilities, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce warned in a July 10 letter to Senate leadership.

With 50 to 75 job openings at any one time, Goodwin Living President, an Alexandria, Virginia, nonprofit that provides health care, hospice and housing services to about 5,000 older adults, is always on the lookout for qualified workers, from nursing assistants to housekeepers.

Of Goodwin Living's 1,500 employees, 70% hail from foreign countries. As a result of the White House's immigration reforms, the organization has hemorrhaged seven staff members in the last couple years, according to CEO Rob Liebreich.

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Gen Z and millennials are buying time-shares

Many are finding value in the financial investment

Kathleen Wong
USA TODAY

The first major investment for Meghan and Crosby Brackins as a young married couple was not a house or car payment. It was a time-share.

The North Carolina residents made the purchase in 2023 after crunching the numbers. As a photographer-videographer duo who not only love to travel, but also do it for work, it seemed to make financial sense. They were tired of spending money on hotels and vacation rentals that didn't seem worth it.

Crosby had also grown up traveling and staying in time-shares owned by his friend's parents. He always knew he wanted to provide the same experience for his own children.

"One of our family values is exploring, seeing the world and really molding that for our family," he told USA TODAY. "As a young couple who didn't quite have kids yet, this was an investment that we were excited to make for a lifetime – a lifetime of memories for our future kids."

The couple is on the cusp between Gen Z and millennial, with Crosby, 28, and Meghan, 31. They are part of a growing number of young Americans finding value in the financial investment of a time-share, according to the 2026 U.S. Shared Vacations Ownership Owners Report, released on July 29 by the American Resort Development Association.

Based on nearly 5,300 interviews with time-share owners between January and February 2026, the report found millennials make up half of all time-share owners and Gen Z leading new ownership. Gen Z makes up 54% of recent time-share purchases, according to the report.

A time-share's often hefty cost and lifetime commitment isn't for everyone, but it's appealing to younger generations who prioritize travel in their budgets and game the system to work for their dream trips.

"Everybody knows how they want to spend their money," said Meghan. "We may be the ones traveling the world, but we aren't the ones with the nicest cars, and I don't get my nails done or hair done often. So I think it's just a shift in priorities. And for us, making memories while traveling is worth the sacrifice in other places of our budget."

Younger owners to the forefront for time-shares

Driving some of the allure for younger travelers is how the time-share industry has evolved over recent decades. Instead of fixed weeks, most companies now operate on a points

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COVID-19 tax refund at risk after court ruling

Medora Lee
USA TODAY

The potential for a big COVID-era tax refund may have just gotten a haircut in the latest court ruling that touches on the subject, according to lawyers.

A federal tax court judge ruled last week in Bowen v. Commissioner that only deadline-related, not accuracy-related, penalties during the COVID-19 pandemic years qualify for the protections of Internal Revenue Code Section 7508A, the law used to allow the government to delay tax deadlines, stop penalty fees, and pause interest during emergencies like the 3½-year pandemic.

If the ruling holds, COVID-related refund and abatement claims millions of Americans may have filed for by July 10 could be subject to this more limited interpretation by the IRS and see either smaller or no refunds. However, lawyers warn this setback may only be temporary, and Americans should hang in.

"Appellate courts will have the final say," wrote Matthew Lee, partner at Fox Rothschild in a blog post. "Final answers may take several years."

What is Section 7508A meant for?

Section 7508A is meant to provide relief to taxpayers in times of crisis. By giving the IRS the authority to temporarily halt tax deadlines, affected individuals and businesses don't have to face financial penalties for late filings or payments. The scope of relief is what various courts are deciding, lawyers said.

Kwong v. United States late last year kicked off the possibility the IRS would owe tens of millions of Americans COVID-era refunds. The judge in that Court of Federal Claims case said the IRS couldn't assess underpayment interest, failure-to-pay penalties and failure-to-file penalties during the federal COVID-19 health emergency and disaster, and the time to file refund claims and United States Tax Court petitions was also suspended.

The IRS had tried to limit the period Section 7508A would apply to during the pandemic, but the Kwong case invalidated that attempt and said the halt to the tax deadlines extended through the end of the pandemic. Additionally, not only were filing deadlines postponed, but interest and penalties couldn't accrue and the statute of limitations for claiming credits or refunds was suspended. The government is appealing this ruling.

The latest Bowen ruling didn't limit the time period, but it narrowed the types of acceptable claims to only deadline-related ones, Lee said.

"Key questions about the breadth of Section 7508A relief remain unresolved," Lee said.

What should Americans do?

For now, Americans should stay the course, lawyers said. Any taxpayer, including individuals, small businesses, large corporations, estates, and trusts, could still be eligible for a refund or abatement, National Taxpayer Advocate Erin Collins has said. Collins heads the Taxpayer Advocate Service, an independent office within the IRS.

"The issue reaches taxpayers with obligations related to income, employment, estate, gift, and excise taxes," she said. "It may also affect taxpayers who filed late international information returns, which can result in significant penalties even when no tax is due."

However, Americans will have to stay patient. "The appellate process is not known for expediency, so we expect it will take a few years for the courts to sort out these issues," Lee said.

Courts also have to decide whether penalties originally assessed before the pandemic relief period and the related interest are subject to additional penalty and interest accrual during the pandemic relief period, experts said.

"The final answer will be determined by the Courts of Appeals and, perhaps, the Supreme Court," Lee said.

Retailer eBay settles stalking campaign suit for nearly $56M

Anthony Thompson
USA TODAY

E-commerce giant eBay has settled with a Massachusetts couple over a lawsuit involving an alleged harassment campaign that included stalking, threats and the mailing of live cockroaches and spiders, a bloody pig mask and a funeral wreath.

David and Ina Steiner, founders of EcommerceBytes, a trade publication in which the couple report on various e-commerce companies, including eBay, "in an effort to assist e-commerce sellers," filed a lawsuit on July 21, 2021, in a federal court in Massachusetts. Scalli Murphy Law, P.C., which represented the Steiners, announced the nearly $56 million settlement on its website July 27.

"David and I were on the same page that this settlement should and must be made public – as victims who want to prevent something like this from ever happening to anyone else, and as reporters who believe in transparency," Ina Steiner told The Associated Press. "We hope that this case will serve as a deterrent."

The settlement ends six years of litigation during which the Steiners alleged employees at eBay began targeting them in 2019 after they published "negative coverage" of the e-commerce company and "the upper echelons of the corporation," according to the lawsuit obtained by USA TODAY.

Under the settlement agreement, the couple will receive $48.7 million in compensation, which includes $46.15 million from eBay and $2,550,000 from former eBay executives. The remaining roughly $7 million of the settlement will go toward nonprofit organizations and a "charity dedicated to protecting First Amendment rights in the name of Ina Steiner."

USA TODAY contacted the Steiners' attorneys for comment July 29.

The agreement announced July 27 follows an earlier tentative settlement in February that ultimately fell apart before the parties reached a revised deal this month, AP News reported.

David Steiner told the MetroWest Daily News the couple had hoped to take the case to trial but decided against prolonging the litigation for several more years through likely appeals. The couple would then ask a federal judge in June to restore the case to the trial calendar, ultimately reaching the new settlement in July.

In 2020, the Justice Department, through the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts, indicted former eBay employees and a former eBay contractor on accusations of running the "terror campaign." Each defendant would ultimately plead guilty to multiple charges, including conspiracy and cyberstalking, before receiving prison sentences or home confinement.

Criminal charges also were brought against eBay in 2024; however, the company agreed to pay the maximum available criminal fine of $3 million and undertake serious corrective action.

The campaign by the now-former eBay employees began with threatening messages on social media and "vulgar emails" before escalating into deliveries of live insects, a bloody pig mask, pornography, a funeral wreath and a book about surviving the death of a spouse.

Prosecutors said employees also posted fake Craigslist ads using the couple's home address, sent explicit magazines to neighbors, conducted in-person surveillance, and discussed installing a GPS tracker on the Steiners' vehicle.

Gen Z

Continued from Page 1B

system, similar to airline miles. "The flexibility of the points really started to turn the industry and started to really open it up to really the Gen Z, millennial and Gen X demographic," said Mike Flaskey, president and COO of Marriott Vacations Worldwide, which switched over in 2010. The industry is also adding more "experiential" offerings, like culinary experiences or exclusive events, to time-share owners. In the report, Gen Z owners said they're most drawn to amenities like activities and food and beverage, including room service.

"It's certainly the sweet spot for time-shares," Jason Gamel, president and CEO of ARDA, told USA TODAY. "It's going to be the new married couples who may first and foremost want to travel, say, to urban destinations and be very adventurous. Then when they may have families of their own, those families bring into play the additional space."

The Brackins regularly use their time-share to go to Orlando to visit theme parks and Hilton Head Island, one of their favorite destinations. This past year, they took their family – including their 13-month-old son – to Hawaii, using their points to get a three-bedroom unit. They've also gifted their points to others.

The report found nearly a third of Gen Z owners said their time-share purchase was motivated by resort location while roughly a quarter were inspired by financial savings.

Crosby said they "geek out" on optimizing their points "to get the biggest bang for the buck," like avoiding weekend stays since they cost the most. In 2024, they scored an impromptu room at a Ritz-Carlton in Lake Tahoe – a place Meghan said she'd never thought she'd get the chance to stay.

The price for travel

The cost of a time-share is significant, but the Brackins feel it's worth it. As Marriott Vacation Club owners, they paid $25,000 for a set of points and $12,900 for a traditional week, which they often trade for points, for a total initial cost of $37,900. They also pay an annual fee of $3,840 for their two buy-ins.

"In our minds, we can approach it as being like, OK, for this is for the rest of our lives through our grandchildren, if they keep like passing it down. There's no time limit to it," Meghan said. "So we can pay $38,000 for the rest of our vacations, and we know as big travelers that we are, that maintenance fee that's coming out $1,500 a year, we would probably use at least for one family vacation. In our minds, that is an investment that we make."

However, many young Americans may not find throwing down such a large lump sum for a time-share to be practical, especially when milestones such as homeownership feel unattainable. In the last decade, home prices have skyrocketed faster than wages. According to new data from the Pew Research Center, nearly nine in 10 adults under 40 say buying a first home is harder now than for their parents' generation. Time-share owners tend to have higher incomes, with only 6% earning less than $75,000 a year, according to the report.

Time-shares also are a lifetime commitment and annual fees are subject to increase. Reselling can be a tricky process with fine print, and people sometimes fall into scams.

The Brackins' choice to purchase a time-share was driven not only by their personal desire for travel but also to help open doors and make new connections for their photography business. On a trip to Miami, Crosby met a local real estate agent that led to a gig shooting luxury penthouses.

"It needs to be an asset, not a liability," he said.

Economy

Continued from Page 1B

"When you lose people who are doing great work, it's really hard to find replacements for them. And, even when you do, those replacements don't come with the same knowledge and developed relationships that the people that have been with us had," Liebreich said.

He says he's living the workforce version of Jenga – the more wooden blocks you pull, the greater risk the whole structure will collapse. The loss of the existing labor pool just as demand from the nation's aging population is rising will make it harder for seniors to get care and will drive up the cost of that care, Liebreich said.

"At a time where we actually need more hands, we're pulling away these pieces and taking away parts which would give us more hands," he said. "Every American has a vested interest in having more capable hands available."

Rebecca Shi, CEO of the American Business Immigration Coalition, said fewer immigrant workers will weaken industries like Liebreich's already struggling to keep pace with demand. TPS recipients account for 15% of noncitizen healthcare workers.

"If our goal is to strengthen the U.S. economy, we should be keeping vetted, work-authorized people on the job, not creating chaos for employers, workers and the communities that depend on them," Shi said.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu waits to speak at a rally in support of TPS protections for Haitian migrants in Boston on July 23. BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

Does TPS help or hurt American workers?

Established by Congress in 1990, TPS gives temporary protection to people who don't feel safe returning to countries plagued by disaster or armed conflict such as El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

President Barack Obama granted this status to Haitians in 2010 after an earthquake devastated their island. Trump unsuccessfully tried to end TPS during his first term; it was then extended under the Biden administration.

When Trump returned to office last year, he moved to end the TPS status of about 1.3 million immigrants from 17 countries legally living in the United States under the program as part of his immigration reforms that he says are critical to securing the livelihood of U.S.-born workers. The White House said in a recent economic report that "record flows of illegal immigrants depressed wages for Americans, inflated the demand for housing and drained the welfare system."

Critics argue a program offering short-term amnesty in emergency situations has expanded beyond its original intent. Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Missouri, recently called TPS a "one-way racket towards permanent mass migration" on the Senate floor.

That resulting migration is a drain on public resources and on taxpayers, they say. "The Trump administration is right to let these overused TPS programs expire as originally intended," Daniel West, director of government relations for Heritage Action, the lobbying arm of the Heritage Foundation, said in a statement.

Some Republicans don't agree. Mike DeWine, the Republican governor of Ohio, told CBS that deporting Haitian migrants – thousands of whom live in his state – is a "mistake" that will kill jobs and damage the local economy.

"These are people who have helped Springfield really come back," DeWine said of Haitians who have filled jobs and opened businesses in his hometown. "The Haitians who are living there and employed there, they came there to work and they came there because there were jobs that were not being filled by other people."

Economic ripples from ending Temporary Protected Status

Broadly speaking, economists say they don't anticipate widespread economic reverberations including labor shortages.

"The truth is even with all the TPS termination and deportations, we are talking about fewer than a million people losing work authorization or being deported from inside the U.S. cumulatively since the start of the Trump administration. This is out of a labor force of nearly 170 million people," said Daniel Di Martino, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute who researches immigration. "So any labor market impact of immigration is very limited and only concentrated in more affected industries that employ illegal immigrants in specific areas such as the Miami metro area."

How limited and how concentrated is a matter of some debate.

A group of economists told the Supreme Court in April that deporting immigrant workers does not lift wages or provide meaningful benefits to American workers. In fact, they said, eliminating the TPS program could result in the loss of more than 600,000 American jobs in four years.

TPS recipients are homeowners and taxpayers who "are overwhelmingly employed, pay billions annually in taxes and fill essential roles in healthcare, construction, transportation and food production," the amicus brief read.

The brief cites research that says deporting TPS recipients would reduce job opportunities for U.S. workers. In fact, a recent study showed that a large and sudden increase in deportations causes a "substantial reduction" in the employment of American workers because fewer new businesses open and more existing businesses close, these economists said.

The construction industry has seen the largest drop in employment, according to Elizabeth Cox, a University of Colorado Boulder professional research assistant in the economics department. Service sector jobs in auto repair shops, commercial machinery repair shops, nail salons and dry cleaning businesses have also recorded substantial declines.

"We see that there has been a decline in employment for both immigrants – authorized and unauthorized – and U.S.-born workers in response to the heightened ICE activity from 2025. Importantly, there's also no evidence that wages have increased in response to immigration enforcement for either of these groups," Cox told USA TODAY. "This is largely counter to the narrative we often see in the media, that deportations will create better job opportunities for U.S.-born workers. The evidence instead suggests that enforcement has hurt the labor market by decreasing employment with no change to wages."

Communities with large TPS populations will feel the effects most sharply, from higher prices and longer waits for home repairs and remodels to scarcer care options for young children or aging parents, said Stan Veuger, an economist with the American Enterprise Institute.

A recent study from economists at the University of Utah's Eccles School of Business found that increased deportations caused nearly 2,000 fewer homes to be built per state per year, resulting in an 18% increase in new home prices.

"When you suddenly reduce immigration a lot or you suddenly deport a lot of people, it doesn't make people's lives enormously better," Veuger said. "It really is not an economic boom for the workers who remain."

Contributing: Trevor Hughes

50★States

News from across the USA

ALABAMA Mountain Brook: Mountain Brook is among the wealthiest suburbs in America, according to a new ranking from MoneyLion. The Birmingham-area suburb ranked No. 24 on the new list of 50 of the nation's wealthiest suburbs.

ALASKA Kodiak: The U.S. Air Force has awarded Rocket Lab a $266 million contract for up to 18 missile defense-related test launches from Pacific Spaceport Complex-Alaska on Kodiak Island over the next two years, KMXT reported.

ARIZONA Douglas: The U.S. Department of Agriculture said it will spend $25 million on a facility in Arizona to disperse sterile flies used to combat the flesh-eating livestock pest New World screwworm, the agency said.

ARKANSAS Hot Springs: National Park Medical Center in Hot Springs has closed its OB-GYN and labor-and-delivery program following the unexpected death of its only obstetrician-gynecologist, KATV reported.

CALIFORNIA Sacramento: WalletHub, a personal finance company, released its report for the best and worst school systems for 2026. California ranked in the bottom half of the list, falling at No. 31.

COLORADO Denver: A new study shows Colorado has one of the nation's biggest issues with fatal crashes involving aggressive or careless driving. The Lending Tree analysis showed Colorado had the fifth largest percentage of fatal crashes involving unsafe driving behaviors in the country.

CONNECTICUT New Haven: A new Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection report found that domestic violence was linked to nearly one-third of the state's homicides in 2025, WTNH reported.

DELAWARE Dover: The American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware issued another letter to Gov. Matt Meyer and Attorney General Kathy Jennings July 27, urging them to provide clearer guidance on when and how local law enforcement can interact with U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: The District Department of Transportation has launched a pilot program to coat streets in five heat-prone neighborhoods with solar-reflective "cool pavement" designed to reduce road temperatures and help combat the city's urban heat island effect, DC News Now reported.

GEORGIA Marietta: Wellstar Health System, one of the largest in the state of Georgia, is making major cuts to its workforce, but those working in provider roles seem to have been spared. The company announced that 761 employees from its corporate offices, services teams and administrative functions as part of Wellstar Medical Group will be laid off.

HAWAII Honolulu: Hawaii awarded $1.8 million in wildfire mitigation grants to eight organizations to fund projects such as firebreak construction, invasive vegetation removal, managed grazing and evacuation planning as the state enters peak wildfire season, Hawaii News Now reported.

IDAHO Boise: Boise State University Athletics received a $2.5 million donation to support the North End Zone expansion at Albertsons Stadium, a project that will add premium seating, expanded hospitality areas and about 1,600 seats, KTVB7 reported.

ILLINOIS Rockford: Rockford University has introduced a new degree pathway designed to help licensed practical nurses advance into registered nursing roles with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

INDIANA West Lafayette: Faculty, staff and students are again able to access TikTok while on Purdue University's WiFi after university administrators announced that the ban on the social media app has been lifted.

IOWA Des Moines: In 2020, Harvest Academy admitted its first students into the nonprofit's two-year, therapeutic vocational school to help voluntarily rehabilitate men who struggled with homelessness, substance abuse or incarceration. Now, the organization has started a major expansion of its operations. Harvest Academy has broken ground on a 20-acre campus located south of Des Moines that will help expand its capacity to up to 50 students.

HIGHLIGHT: FLORIDA

Undergraduate students work in the University of Central Florida's 10-by-10-meter Exolith Lab. MALCOLM DENEMARK/USA TODAY NETWORK

Oviedo: Shielded by white protective suits and powered air-purifying respirators, four college students dug into dusty, sharp-edged simulated moon soil amid the otherworldly environment of the University of Central Florida's Regolith Bin. This airlock-equipped 10-by-10-meter enclosure at the university's Exolith Lab serves as a rare space-hardware test bed where researchers can help refine NASA's vision of building humanity's first lunar base near the moon's south pole from ground level. The university's Florida Space Institute manages the Exolith Lab, which is nestled inside a warehouse just north of campus in Oviedo. The simulated lunar soil in the bin measures more than 3 feet deep.

KANSAS Topeka: Five organizations have spent at least six figures in 2026 to campaign for their side in the Kansas Supreme Court judicial selection constitutional amendment, according to state data. The data revealed that the leading group against the amendment is outpacing the combined top four organizations advocating for the amendment.

KENTUCKY Louisville: Design work and construction plans are underway for a multi-year road project intended to strengthen residents' access to the Ohio riverfront in Louisville's Portland neighborhood.

LOUISIANA New Orleans: World Monument Fund, an independent organization dedicated to preserving invaluable places around the world, has deemed Louisiana's most cherished city, New Orleans, as one of the most irreplaceable places in the United States.

MAINE Sanford: The International Woolen Mill is now officially classified as an abandoned property, clearing the way for the city to address longstanding hazards and unsafe conditions at the site.

MARYLAND Wicomico County: The state recently celebrated the acquisition of the 445-acre property that will become Wicomico County's first state park. Wetipquin Creek State Park, named after the creek that flows through it and empties into the Nanticoke River, will conserve and foster an appreciation of the natural resources of the Delmarva Peninsula, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources said.

MASSACHUSETTS Belmont: Massachusetts MBTA riders could save money this fall with three new discounts on public transportation. Gov. Maura Healey announced the new "affordability initiatives." They include an "unlimited" transfer window, the elimination of higher express bus fares and free fares for some seniors. Plus, some commuter rail discounts from the summer will continue into the fall, she said.

MICHIGAN Wyoming: University of Michigan Health-West will implement a policy boosting protections for religious employees as part of a settlement in a First Amendment lawsuit.

MINNESOTA St. Paul: Gov. Tim Walz signed an executive order prohibiting state employees from using inside information to bet on prediction market sites includng Kalshi and Polymarket.

MISSISSIPPI Jackson: Kindergarten reading readiness scores have been improving over the years, but officials say this year's results will set a new starting line from previous years. After revising its kindergarten readiness assessment, the Mississippi Department of Education reported scores rising from 37% in fall 2025 to 55% in spring 2026, establishing a new statewide baseline.

MISSOURI Springfield: Springfield's electrical grid is a step closer to becoming more reliable during periods of high demand. City Utilities celebrated the completion of a zinc battery energy storage system project that will expand its capacity.

MONTANA Great Falls: The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, which attracts about 50,000 visitors annually, faces uncertainty as all three of its full-time staff members are set to leave this year, Montana Free Press reported.

NEBRASKA Omaha: Omaha Public Schools teachers will receive a 1.5% pay raise instead of the customary 3% increase this school year under a union-backed agreement aimed at helping the district close a projected $50 million budget shortfall, WOWT reported.

NEVADA Washoe County: High school lacrosse is officially a sanctioned sport in Washoe County. After the Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association voted to approve sanctioning the sport earlier this year, it was still up to each county's school board to give final approval. The Washoe County School District Board of Trustees approved sanctioning lacrosse.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Portsmouth: Renee Plummer, co-founder and vice president of Two International Group at Pease International Tradeport, is spearheading a New Hampshire tribute to those who died during the 9/11 attacks on America. Plummer is honoring veterans, firefighters and first responders by coordinating The Honor Summit, the placement of two huge LED lights at the Mount Washington summit Sept. 9-12.

NEW JERSEY Trenton: A new initiative from state Attorney General Jennifer Davenport is gearing up to bolster civil rights protections in public schools and colleges, in response to the Trump administration shrinking the federal government's role enforcing these protections.

NEW MEXICO Sunland Park: U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar has introduced legislation to protect Mount Cristo Rey, which sits on the U.S. border with Mexico in Sunland Park. The legislation would block President Donald Trump from using eminent domain to build a border wall along the mountain owned by the Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces.

NEW YORK Salamanca: A union representing educators is calling for statewide safeguards against the use of artificial intelligence in schools after a district announced its involvement in a pilot program that includes a humanoid robot's presence in a classroom.

NORTH CAROLINA Wilmington: Novant Health New Hanover Regional Medical Center's Comprehensive Stroke Center has begun using a newly approved clot-removal technology that health system officials say could further reduce treatment times for patients experiencing ischemic strokes. The Wilmington hospital is the first in North Carolina to incorporate THUNDERBOLT, a computer-assisted vacuum thrombectomy system developed by Penumbra, according to a news release.

NORTH DAKOTA Minot: Basin Electric plans to upgrade dozens of wind turbines at its North Dakota wind farms through a repowering project designed to increase electricity output and improve efficiency, KMOT reported.

OHIO Cincinnati: The founder and CEO of a Cincinnati-based e-commerce startup who defrauded investors out of millions of dollars between 2020 and 2022 was sentenced to more than three years in prison.

OKLAHOMA Edmond: "Help is on the way" for competitive swimmers in and visiting Edmond after the city pledged to work with the school district and YMCA of Greater OKC to upgrade air conditioning at Edmond Public Schools Aquatic Center.

OREGON Salem: Work to remove Salem's oldest street tree has been postponed. Meanwhile, city officials have determined that a neighboring tree, also historic, will have to come down, too. Both will be removed later this summer, city spokesman Jason Roberts said.

PENNSYLVANIA Doylestown: The James A. Michener Art Museum has renewed its designation as a Certified Autism Center.

RHODE ISLAND Wakefield: In a "milestone" that helps demonstrate a northern shift in shark travels, the Atlantic Shark Institute of Wakefield announced that it has tagged its first hammerhead shark off Block Island. The electronic tag will allow researchers to follow the hammerhead as it passes receivers in waters off the East Coast for a decade or more, said Jon Dodd, executive director of the Atlantic Shark Institute. The institute tags sharks in Southern waters during the winter, but this is the first time it has tagged a hammerhead in waters off Rhode Island, Dodd said.

SOUTH CAROLINA Columbia: South Carolina State Rep. Jermaine Johnson has selected a Charleston-based clean energy advocate as his running mate in the governor's race.

SOUTH DAKOTA Sioux Falls: A Sioux Falls edition of the classic board game Monopoly is coming soon, Mayor Christine Erickson. The new game will use locations in Sioux Falls for its property squares, plus a customized community chest, chance cards and Monopoly money.

TENNESSEE Hohenwald: Billie, a 64-year-old Asian elephant who spent two decades at The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, has died after a recent decline caused by advanced musculoskeletal disease.

TEXAS Corpus Christi: U.S. regulators approved Cheniere Energy's request to introduce natural gas into Train 7 of its Corpus Christi LNG export project, according to a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission letter.

UTAH Salt Lake City: Utah was ranked the nation's best state for a record fourth consecutive year in U.S. News & World Report's 2026 Best States rankings, KUTV reported.

VERMONT Stowe: Travel + Leisure named Bingham Falls as the best waterfall in the state is because it is the quintessential seasonal sight to see during a Vermont summer.

VIRGINIA Augusta County: The Augusta County Library Board of Trustees chose not to move forward with a planned May 2027 Pride Day event, echoing a similar cancellation made by the Augusta County Board of Supervisors in June 2025.

WASHINGTON Yakima: A technology issue forced the Washington State Bar Association to cancel the July bar exam for 645 applicants, with officials planning a makeup test later this year, KING5 reported.

WEST VIRGINIA Kingwood: Preston Memorial Hospital has opened a new infusion and oncology center, WDTV reported.

WISCONSIN Milwaukee: Belle, a 45-year-old African savanna elephant, has been the Milwaukee County Zoo's only remaining elephant since April after the deaths of her herdmates Ruth and Brittany. Now, In Defense of Animals, an animal protection organization, is urging the zoo to retire Belle to an elephant sanctuary, arguing elephants should not live alone in captivity. The zoo strongly disagrees, saying Belle is healthy, well cared for and should remain in Milwaukee.

WYOMING Campbell County: Burnt Hollow Recreation Area is poised for upgrades after the Campbell County Recreation Foundation secured a $50,000 grant to design a multiuse trail system and enhance the 18,000-acre site, Gillette News Record reported.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

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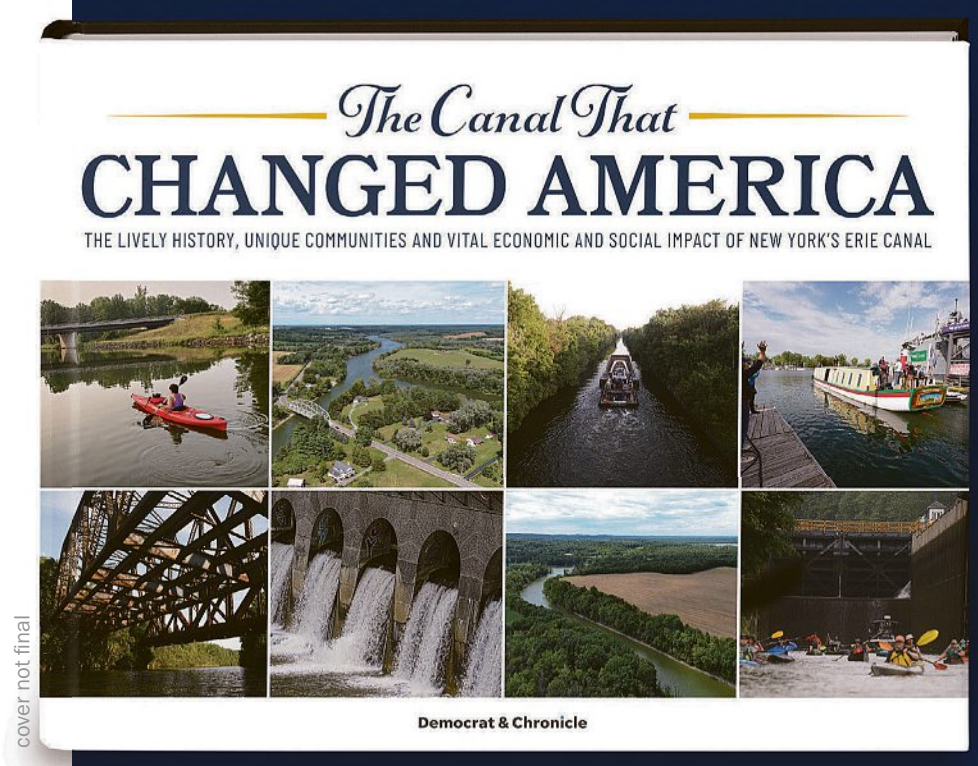
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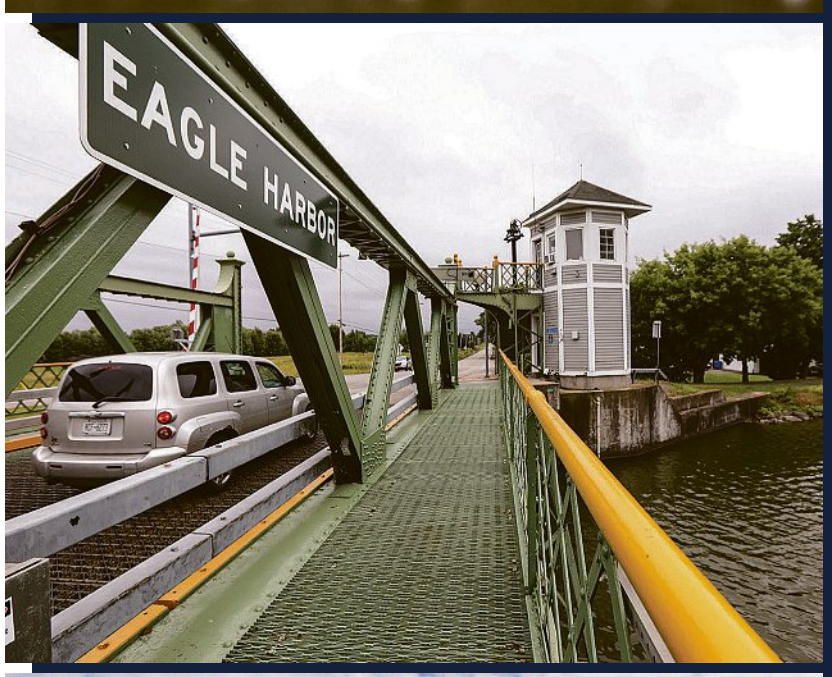

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Democrat & Chronicle

'I don't have to feel alone anymore'

New Women's Pro Baseball League is looking like 'a movement'

Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

Too many times, Kelsie Whitmore was so livid, she wanted to scream to the heavens.

Too many times, Whitmore was so depressed, she wanted to grab all of her baseball equipment and toss it in the ocean.

Too many times, she wondered, whether life was fair, deprived of her love and passion for baseball, simply because she's a woman.

"Then, *this* happened," Whitmore tells USA TODAY Sports. "I still can't believe it."

This is the Women's Pro Baseball League, the first of its kind in more than 70 years, going back to the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, immortalized in the movie "A League of their Own."

Their mantra: "This isn't a league, it's a movement."

This four-team league, which will play all of its seven-inning games at Robin Roberts Stadium in Springfield, Illinois, began its inaugural 30-game season Aug. 1.

"When I first found about it," says Whitmore, 28, "I was in shock. I never thought a women's pro league would ever exist, not in the midst of my career. I'm super excited, super grateful, that people like Keith would take a chance and see the value in it and invest in us. It's going to open up so many doors and opportunities for young girls.

"I don't think people realize how huge this is. There never has to be a girl go through the same drain as I did."

Whitmore, who played for the U.S. national team in the Women's Baseball World Cup, grew up in Temecula, California, where she was always the lone girl playing baseball on boys teams. Little League. Pony League. Travel leagues. High school.

When she got to college, there was no place for her, and she wound up receiving a scholarship to play on the Cal State Fullerton softball team.

See NIGHTENGALE, Page 4C

**TOP: Ashton Lansdell, Kelsie Whitmore, Denae Benites, Commissioner/co-founder Justine Siegal, Lexi Hastings and Mo'ne Davis are inaugural figures in the new Women's Pro Baseball League.
BOTTOM: Baseball fans wait to get autographs from WPBL players after a practice at the Banner Island Ballpark in downtown Stockton, California, on July 2. The WPBL made a stop there as a part of a Countdown Tour promoting its upcoming season.** PHOTOS BY GETTY AND USA TODAY SPORTS

Gabe Lacques
Columnist
USA TODAY

Dodgers winning mind games

2-time Series champs get Skubal in trade

Crazy to say it, but Matt Beaty and Michael Busch have ruined baseball.

Who are they, you might ask?

Oh, just a couple of dudes with pretty left-handed swings who found their way to the Los Angeles Dodgers organization, benefited from their tutelage, and were traded to the San Diego Padres and Chicago Cubs for a couple of much younger players in River Ryan and Zyhir Hope, respectively.

Who are they, you might ask?

Perhaps you know of Ryan and Hope by now, or, as they could call them in the Motor City, Ryan's Hope. Ryan and Hope and a young man named Brady Smith were traded by the Dodgers to the Detroit Tigers late on the evening of Aug. 1. The Dodgers received the greatest left-handed pitcher since Clayton Kershaw.

Tarik Skubal is a Dodger, and perhaps more significantly the avatar for

See LACQUES, Page 4C

Tarik Skubal won the AL Cy Young award in 2024 and 2025. LON HORWEDEL/ IMAGN IMAGES VIA REUTERS CONNECT

Protect College Sports Act gains some momentum

John Brice
USA TODAY

White House phone calls. Talks with NCAA leadership and every major member conference.

A day that started with bill co-sponsors and their staffs already working the phones shortly after 7 a.m. July 31 ended with arguably the most significant step to date for the Protect College Sports Act.

Facing stiff headwinds to keep alive hope of a U.S. Senate floor vote before recess on Aug. 7, Senators Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Eric Schmitt, R-Missouri, specifically, held a litany of conversations with college athletics' top power brokers – most notably Big Ten Commissioner Tony Petitti, as well as the SEC's Greg Sankey.

Schmitt, who late Friday spoke exclusively to USA TODAY Sports, peeled back the layers of the day – and how the last two weeks helped resuscitate a Protect College Sports Act that had nearly been left in the dustbin.

"I mean we've spent the entirety of

See ACT, Page 4C

Maxx Crosby in own peace over nixed trade

Jarrett Bell
Columnist
USA TODAY

Defensive end Maxx Crosby is entering his eighth NFL season, all with the Raiders. He has had 69 ½ sacks.
CANDICE WARD/IMAGN IMAGES

HENDERSON, NV – When it was over, after the Baltimore Ravens flunked Maxx Crosby on their physical in early March to nullify what appeared to be a blockbuster trade and sent him back on a cross-country flight, the Las Vegas Raiders star edge rusher did what could be aptly described as a "Maxx Crosby thing."

"I didn't go home. No, I came straight here," Crosby told USA TODAY Sports, reflecting in an outdoor tent at the Raiders headquarters following the first full-squad training camp practice on July 29. "I didn't even change or nothing."

That it was somewhere around 4 a.m., well, that's the Maxx thing. No time for a pity party.

Instead, it was time for another workout.

"(Shoot), I got back from Baltimore, it wasn't supposed to happen. Obviously," Crosby continued. "They flew me back immediately. It was 4:30 in the morning. I came right back into the building. They looked at me like I was a snake animal.

"It was, 'What the (heck) is Bigfoot doing walking back in here?' I mean, it was just another day."

'Just a different cat'

Crosby, 28, has proved so much since emerging as a fourth-round pick from Eastern Michigan in 2019 to become one of the NFL's best players. There are many layers to this.

He proudly declares, as he should, that he's been sober for more than six years after battling alcohol addiction that included a stint in rehab.

His body art – images, including tattoos of his oldest daughter, Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant, cover him from his neck to his torso – tells another story about his commitment and a pivotal moment. A few years ago, after shoulder and hand surgeries, five artists took 36 hours to paint the tattoos during marathon back-to-back sessions.

His motor is special, too. It says something that of his 69 ½ career sacks, 22 ½ of them came in the fourth quarter.

And it said something else about how Crosby is wired when he bolted from Raiders headquarters in anger in December when he was told the team would shut him down for the final two games because of the knee injury.

He wanted to play.

Then there's the rep he's burnished in the Raiders' sphere for his early calls. That's one of the first things they mention when describing the five-time Pro Bowler. He comes to work early.

"Maxx is one of one," Raiders owner Mark Davis told USA TODAY Sports, overseeing yet another franchise reboot that includes the arrival of quarterback Fernando Mendoza, the No. 1 pick overall.

"Playing-wise, culture-wise, everything else. He's just a different cat. You can't beat him in the building. He's here at 4 in morning, in the weight room."

How do you know he's really here at 4?

"Fernando told me," Davis shot back. "Fernando got here at about 4:30 and Maxx was already here."

Maxx Crosby's reaction to failed Ravens-Raiders trade

After the trade fell apart – Baltimore was supposed to exchange two first-round picks for Crosby, but the deal wouldn't have been official until the new league year commenced and was contingent on him passing the physical as he rehabbed from surgery for a torn meniscus in his left knee – Crosby refused to see himself as a victim.

The Ravens, who could have used Crosby's impact for a defense that has developed a pattern in recent years for blowing leads in crunch time, quickly pivoted to signing former Bengals defensive end Trey Hendrickson, 31, to a four-year, $112 million free agent deal.

Hendrickson, by the way, was recovering from core muscle surgery after missing half of last season due to a hip injury.

"I know they were doing what they thought was best for them," Crosby said. "That's fine. You don't want me. Make you look crazy. It's OK."

There's no issue from Davis, even though the Raiders could have acquired two first-round picks from the deal.

"You know how much I had to pay (Steve) Bisciotti to send him back?" Davis said, tongue-in-cheek, referring to the Ravens owner. "I never wanted him to go in the first place."

That first day back, Crosby made the rounds with a message. He said he visited with Davis, general manager John Spytek, coach Klint Kubiak, coordinator Rob Leonard and defensive line coach Travis Smith.

"I went to every single office, one by one, and told them, 'I'm here. Let's go,' " he said. "That's how I operate. I don't live and dwell on b.s."

What really happened

Crosby, who achieved his rehab goal and was medically cleared to fully participate in training camp drills – he reported early, of course, coming with the rookies – maintains there are some elements from his experience in Baltimore that have not been publicly revealed. At the time, an emotional Ravens GM Eric DeCosta said during a news conference that he was "gutted" by the decision to pull out of the trade but did not elaborate on many details.

Although Crosby was rehabbing from his surgery in January – his surgeon, Neal ElAttrache, told ESPN that he expected any apparent future risk would lessen as Crosby continued to recover – the Ravens reportedly were concerned with long-term risks.

"I don't get into details on that because, you know, it's a business," Crosby said. "People, to this day, have no idea of what happened. Not one person has been right. And I just got to sit here and listen to all the (b.s). And that's the part about being a man. I can sit here and be like everybody else. Spill everything. You know what I mean? I think being quiet is peaceful. I don't want to be like anybody else. I don't want to have any drama in my life. I like my life very simple. My girls are my world. My football is my world.

"I know the truth," he added. "Everybody that was involved knows what really transpired. I've moved forward. I don't dwell on (stuff). That's the one thing about me I try to inspire all the people in my circle, and my teammates. Stop worrying about yesterday. Stop thinking about tomorrow. If you just master where you're at, like truly being present, you're going to have better results."

The trade that almost happened-but-didn't may ultimately turn out as a huge win for the Raiders, seeking to re-establish culture with a new regime. There's no question that Crosby, who has thrived despite one losing season after another, has some extra fuel. As he put it during his post-practice press conference on Wednesday, "It's just added points and given me a little more reason to go out there and whoop a--."

Maxx Crosby/Cowboys trade rumors

Still, Crosby's case continues to ignite intrigue.

On Tuesday, when Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said during his camp opening press conference that he would be willing to give up a top draft pick for an impact player who could help his team win big now, it inspired a round of speculation that Crosby should be that target.

So, that's how the first day of full-squad training camp practice began for Crosby, with TV sports shows – hello, "First Take" – debating his future. After all, the Raiders demonstrated that they would part with their centerpiece player for the right price.

You'd think it's another type of challenge for Crosby to deal with the outside noise.

"It doesn't change anything for me, to be honest," he insisted. "People act like they don't ... if you're an athlete in this position, you see everything. Regardless, if you want to or not. You can try to live in a cage, but then your teammate is coming up to you, 'How do you deal with it?'

"I'm getting rehab, the first thing this morning, and all my teammates are looking at it and I'm trying to ignore it. But ultimately, you just have to learn to roll with the punches. I've gone through a lot in my personal life, a lot in my football life. So, (stuff) like that is nothing. If the child version of me was looking at Stephen A. Smith talking about, 'Is this dude the guy to come win you a Super Bowl?' like I think that's cool. Whether it's made up or not. They wouldn't be talking about you if you weren't doing something right. And I know what I bring to the table as a player, and as a leader, and as a worker. I want to be here. Everyone knows that. So, you can't let any of that (stuff) get into your head or let it distract you."

In the meantime, the Maxx Crosby watch rolls on – in more ways than one.

Follow Bell on X: @JarrettBell

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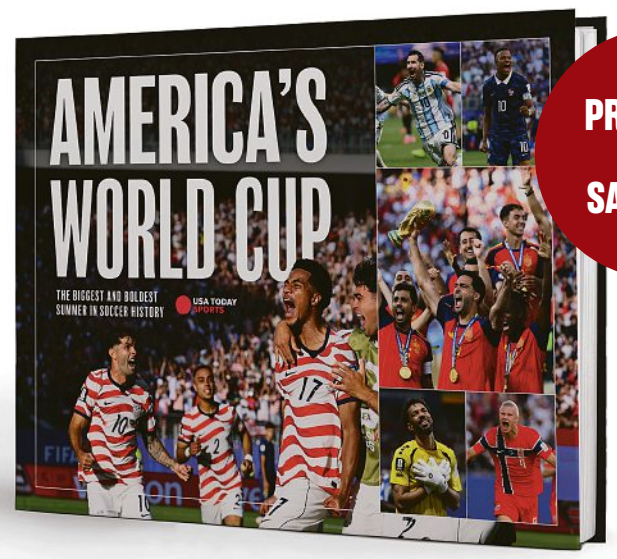

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NCAA fighting new fifth-year ruling

John Brice
USA TODAY

The NCAA is taking aim and fighting back against a U.S. District Court judge's ruling that has temporarily granted a fifth year of eligibility to college student-athletes from the high school class of 2022.

In a letter obtained Saturday Aug. 1 by USA TODAY Sports, the NCAA outlined its intent to fight against the ruling of Judge Charlotte Sweeney, who presides over the U.S. District Court of Colorado.

"The District Court of Colorado's decision (Wisne v. NCAA) is egregiously wrong," NCAA chief legal officer Scott Bearby wrote in a memo Saturday to NCAA membership and directly obtained by USA TODAY Sports.

"The court's decision to certify a nationwide class and grant sweeping injunctive relief with virtually no evidence, and without witness testimony or even so much as a hearing, invites further chaos in college sports and irreparably harms thousands of student-athletes already on campus."

Four different college football general managers, speaking Saturday on condition of anonymity due to the uncertain nature of this ruling and the potential impact to rosters, told USA TODAY Sports that they have held informal meetings and begun the process of assessing potential roster additions from the group of senior football players whose careers ended with the 2025 season and had graduated in 2022.

Additionally, multiple conferences – including the Big Ten and Pac-12, among others – dispatched information or answered questions that surrounded Sweeney's ruling.

"We're prepared and we are gathering a list," said a power conference general manager. "But we are not yet acting."

Per the NCAA memo, its legal team also emphasized per its viewpoint that one U.S. court cannot override another court's prior decision in this method.

"The Court has not yet entered an order specifying what it is purporting to enjoin – a requirement under the law," the NCAA memo continued. "We will seek that clarification immediately. But to be clear, one federal court cannot enjoin a settlement approved and entered by another court. The House injunction remains in effect according to its plain terms.

"The Colorado court plainly lacks the authority to undermine the House injunction, which all of the plaintiffs in the Colorado case are bound by, including the roster limits and revenue share cap."

The NCAA then concluded its letter to membership.

"We intend to appeal the Colorado order and will seek to restore the status quo as soon as possible to protect participation opportunities for the countless student-athletes who chose where to attend school based on the understanding that the rules adopted by the NCAA's member institutions would be applied as written.

"Schools and coaches must make their own independent decisions, but an injunction is intended to be short in duration and the NCAA intends to appeal it on an expedited basis.

"The membership made a considered decision about the timing of the Age-Based Eligibility Rule in order to protect competitive opportunities for thousands of student-athletes already on campus.

"Every federal circuit to address similarly flawed legal claims and similarly deficient evidentiary record has reversed."

Rebuilding Sparks trade Plum to Mercury

Callie Fin
USA TODAY

The Los Angeles Sparks touted the acquisition of Kelsey Plum as the dawn of a fresh competitive start in 2025.

Seventeen months later, the franchise is starting over.

Los Angeles reportedly agreed to trade the five-time All-Star and two-time champion to the Phoenix Mercury on Aug. 1. The move comes shortly before the WNBA trade deadline at 3 p.m. ET Aug. 2.

ESPN reported the deal yielded the Sparks guard Monique Akoa Makani, a 2027 first-round draft pick and a 2028 second-rounder in exchange for Plum.

This comes after Plum requested to be moved from the Las Vegas Aces after the 2024 season, leading to a blockbuster three-team trade including the Seattle Storm that saw the Sparks deal the No. 2 pick in the 2025 draft to secure Plum.

For the second time in two years, Kelsey Plum has been traded, this time to the Mercury. ARYANNA FRANK/GETTY IMAGES

First-year Sparks head coach Lynne Roberts committed to a "winning season" when Plum was formally introduced in Los Angeles. The Sparks finished the 2025 WNBA season with a 21–23 record, placing sixth in the Western Conference and missing the postseason as Plum averaged 19.3 points per game.

The Sparks were 10-17 going into play Aug. 2 and had fired general manager Raegan Pebley on July 12. Since then, the Sparks had lost six in a row.

Plum had not appeared in a game for the Sparks since June 21, when Los Angeles defeated New York 98-97 at Crypto.com Arena. The team announced that she sustained a lower left leg injury.

She also had suffered a right ankle sprain in late May that sidelined her for three games.

Plum was asked Thursday about the possibility of being traded and instead pointed to the fact that she planned to play again when the Sparks visited Portland on Sunday afternoon.

"I'm not taking anything personal. I'm gonna be where my feet are," Plum said then.

Now, Plum will be preparing to suit up for a new team.

The Mercury, who lost to the Aces in the WNBA Finals last season, have also failed to meet expectations so far this year. They had an 11-18 record, placing them fifth in the Western Conference, this season.

Ole Miss puts self at risk after winning the offseason

Matt Hayes
College football columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK

Ole Miss Rebels head coach Pete Golding speaks July 22 to reporters during the SEC Football Kickoff Media Days at the Tampa Marriott. NATHAN RAY SEEBECK/IMAGN IMAGES VIA REUTERS CONNECT

They've won every possible way since being stood up at the altar.

In the court of public opinion, and the court of judge shopping.

By retaining the two most important players on the roster, and beating their tormentor for them in the process.

By being jilted by Lane Kiffin, a coach who's equal parts rare ability and loose cannon. And being saved by a lovable everyman Pete Golding, a coach who seemingly wins the day every time he opens his mouth.

Why in the world would Ole Miss push it now?

Why would the university – riding a hot streak on and off the field since Kiffin decided last December that Ole Miss wasn't good enough and LSU was – decide to sue two payers who they say broke name, image and likeness (NIL) deals and left to follow Kiffin to LSU?

I get it. In this upside-down world of no accountability for players and NIL deals, where a player can transfer from one school, be enrolled in classes at his new school, and accept another offer from another school and transfer again – *ahem*, Ole Miss? – someone at some point has to take responsibility for his actions.

Ole Miss thinks it should be edge Princewill Umanmielen and guard Devin Harper, two former Rebels players who are now projected starters for LSU. Both left Ole Miss after a last-minute loss to Miami in the College Football Playoff semifinals.

And after both, Ole Miss says, signed NIL deals with the Rebels days earlier.

The school's publicist rolled out a timeline and details to anyone interested in hearing its side of the beef. Weird how there was no timeline and details for Luke Ferrelli's departure from Clemson and arrival at Ole Miss.

But that's another story for another lingering argument about tampering. Of which, by the way, Golding absolutely crushed at SEC media days while defending the Rebels' pursuit of Ferrelli.

But instead of merrily going along its way and taking another win in the offseason, Ole Miss decided to get greedy.

It's not enough that quarterback Trinidad Chambliss was given an extra year of eligibility by a hometown judge, which was eventually upheld by – I'm not making this up – the state of Mississippi Supreme Court.

Not enough that star tailback Kewan Lacy reportedly turned down more money from LSU and Kiffin to stay at Ole Miss.

Not enough that Ole Miss proved it could win on the big stage without Kiffin, and still be a force in procuring talent from the transfer portal.

Ole Miss just had to go down this road of petty petulance.

I have no problem forcing Umanmielen and Harper to pay back any money given to them from the time signed with Ole Miss to the time they entered the transfer portal and signed with LSU. But to enforce a breach of contract fees of $550,000 and $400,000, respectively, and include attorney fees and court costs, looks like a wildly spiteful decision.

It also has the stinging aftertaste of rules for thee, but not for me.

I don't care that Ferrelli hadn't yet officially signed his NIL deal with Clemson. Ole Miss swooped in and offered him more money, and took him – out of classes – from Clemson.

So the argument rules are made to be followed rings as hollow as Kiffin's declaration he wasn't saying minority players didn't want to play in Oxford, he was simply relaying the message to Vanity Fair that parents of recruits told him that.

As the brilliant sage Marcia Brady once said, *"Sure, Jan."*

"The University of Mississippi has a responsibility to enforce its contractual terms," Ole Miss said in a released statement, "and this position is consistent with the actions of other institutions in the current landscape of college athletics."

The good folks in Oxford may want to ask Clemson about that one.

There's bad karma around the corner with this thing, just waiting to leap out and bite Ole Miss. The Rebels have climbed nearly all the way to the top of the college football ladder since Kiffin's messy departure, both on the field and in the court of public opinion.

But as they say in the South: The higher you get on the ladder, the more your ass shows.

Matt Hayes is the senior national college football writer for USA TODAY Sports Network. Follow him on X at @MattHayesCFB.

Lacques

Continued from Page 1C

All That Is Wrong With Baseball, he and his new team the whipping boys for a looming lockout whether or not LA wins a seemingly inevitable third consecutive World Series title.

It almost doesn't matter, now. The odds just got increasingly longer that an Atlanta or Philly or Milwaukee will upset the Dodgers in the National League playoffs. As for the dozen-plus dregs that might emerge from the American League quagmire? Hah. Get over .500, and then maybe we can talk about a World Series.

Yet whether or not the Dodgers hoist the piece of metal come October, the narrative is well-established, that they are buying championships, that their methods are as potentially nefarious as those of their kingpin, that no one else stands a chance because of All That Money.

Which simply isn't true. (Well, some of it is.)

The more accurate truth: The Dodgers are kicking everyone's behinds in every facet of the game: drafting, player development, scouting (which includes assessing internal talent) and providing a workplace players want to be.

And they probably just got over on the Detroit Tigers, in the same manner they got over on the Cubs and Padres to acquire Hope and Ryan, who along with Smith stood on each other's shoulders in a trench coat and convinced the Tigers that this was sufficiently equal to Tarik Skubal.

Not to denigrate the players headed to Detroit. Ryan has roared back from Tommy John surgery in August 2024, more muscular and now eight starts into a strong stint at Class AAA Oklahoma City. He could impact the Tigers rotation next spring, if not sooner.

Hope, 21, is "built like a running back," as MLB Pipeline puts it, has 23 homers and a .899 OPS at AA Tulsa, but swing-and-miss concerns exist, as he has a 25% K rate. Smith, a third-round pick in 2023, just got promoted to high A; he's struck out 14.9 batters per nine in his brief minor league career.

But it's hard to believe Detroit couldn't have aimed higher. It's quite possible the Tigers rate Hope higher than other Dodgers outfield prospects; player evaluation is insanely subjective. Yet why not hold out for Josue DePaula (a consensus top four overall prospect) or Mike Sirota (top 15) instead of or in addition to Hope, who ranks closer to 25 or 30 overall. Particularly since they pulled the trigger nearly two days before the trade deadline.

The other problem for Detroit, to borrow a phrase that has been beaten to death by New Age baseball sorts: Will these young men become the best versions of themselves in Detroit's system?

Nothing against the Tigers, but probably not to the extent they would as Dodgers. Which brings us back to Beaty and Busch.

Beaty was a 12th-round pick out of Belmont College in 2015. He was a solid contributor on 2019 and '21 Dodgers teams, posting a .363 OBP in 120 games in 2021. Then the Dodgers traded him to San Diego for Ryan – and Baty promptly batted .093.

Busch's path was a little more normal – 31st overall pick in 2019, brief major league debut in 2023. Yet he was expendable because the Dodgers signed Freddie Freeman for relative pennies on the dollar once Atlanta deemed him replaceable.

So Busch was traded for Hope and pitcher Jackson Ferris in 2024. And Busch has been ... pretty good as a Cub, smacking 34 homers last year, though he's only slightly better than a league average hitter this year.

Point is, the Dodgers got him at the back of the first round, developed him into a consensus top 50 prospect – and used him to plant a trade tree that eventually branched out to Skubal.

Not to bum the Tigers out, but in the Andrew Friedman era, the Dodgers tend not to get burned with their deadline deals.

Exactly 24 hours before the Dodgers acquired Skubal, the Baltimore Orioles quietly traded Dean Kremer and his 6.50 ERA to the Minnesota Twins. That closed the book on a 2018 deal in which the Dodgers got Manny Machado and a trip to the World Series and the Orioles got Rylan Bannon, Yusniel Diaz, Breyvic Valera, Zach Pop and Kremer – the lone playable asset.

Perhaps you remember Willie Calhoun? Dealt in 2017 to acquire Yu Darvish, who helped them to the World Series.

You'd think dealing for Max Scherzer and Trea Turner in their prime might help your trading partner reboot its entire organization. Yet the Washington Nationals received adequate catcher Keibert Ruiz (ranked higher as a prospect than another catcher named Will Smith) and oft-injured pitcher Josiah Gray.

Sure, the Dodgers aren't perfect, and not necessarily out to destroy the trading partner.

Miguel Vargas has developed into an All-Star third baseman after he was acquired in a deal for Tommy Edman in 2024. Yordan Alvarez (for Josh Fields) and Oneil Cruz (for Tony Watson) were massive misses, though both were teenagers at the time.

None of this augurs well for the Tigers.

Don't let the talk of controllable assets and the need to reboot the system fool you: The Tigers simply forfeited a chance at a playoff berth and possible World Series.

Sure, it's possible they get there anyway. The AL is that bad, and the Central eminently winnable.

Now, Skubal is a Dodger, not because they lavished money on him but because the Tigers chose to send him there, and they believed they had the most to offer in return.

Funny how it always seems to work out that way.

Act

Continued from Page 1C

the week before (July 20-24) negotiating this with Sen. Cantwell, Cruz, and myself and staff; it was pretty intense," said Schmitt, who played football at Truman State. "Seven to eight hours a day on it a day, kind of in the middle of all the other stuff we were doing in the Senate. ... I talked to the president (late Friday night) after we got with the SEC and Big Ten. He's very happy; it's a priority for him. But yeah, it started pretty early and it was nonstop."

Here's how it unfolded.

Early in the week, USA TODAY Sports obtained a copy of the 12 "major concessions" being work-shopped to garner Big Ten and SEC support. Eight of the 12, per three people with direct knowledge of the Senate Commerce Committee's work on the act who were granted anonymity due to the sensitive nature of deliberations, were deemed "full concessions."

By Wednesday, in continued conversations with people on Capitol Hill, USA TODAY Sports learned more revisions had been made but optimism had dwindled. "Major concessions were made overnight," a person directly involved with the drafting of the bill said. "At this point, with every passing minute, odds are slimmer that we can move the bill before the August recess.

"We've been working night and day to make the revisions they (Big Ten, SEC) said that they needed (to publicly support the bill). We need an answer. This wasn't a superficial deadline."

Schmitt echoed those sentiments.

"Coming out of committee, my feeling was that that was not going to be a finished product, that this was ... we needed to have more voices at the table," he said. "And clearly, the conferences in the breadth of interests that they spoke to, it was going to be important in trying to get as much support as we could. And, they had issues. We tried to address those. I felt like we got to a good place (Thursday). And then, you know, I was kind of ... it didn't go as I had hoped. ... But I am just not wired to like quit. Maybe that's the former student-athlete in me."

First on Friday night, the Big Ten conducted a vote with its member institutions' presidents and athletics leadership; it voted yes.

At 9:58 p.m., the Big Ten and SEC issued a joint statement of support.

"What people were really focused on was on the (revenue/de facto salary) cap. If you're going to go through this, because we've got all the really important protections for player safety and health care and all those sorts of things, that was always top of mind," Schmitt said. "The transfer issue, eligibility issues, optionality for pooling of media rights was always important. But also, if you're going to go through this and you're going to have the $21.5 million cap and then what can you do to retain players?

"We recognize that the market is much bigger than that because people are just shifting dollars away from rev-share. And it's like these side deals that everybody knows are out there and how you end up with rosters that are $50 million rosters, like if you're paying attention, that's what's going on."

With that obstacle looming, what helped the working committee marshal the Big Ten's and SEC's support?

"The idea was to say, 'OK, we've got the cap, we've got the retention pool cap. We've got the women's sports $5 million (dollars that do not count against school-issued rev-share as outlined here). But how are we going to protect against that?' And so (Friday), the language really was like, OK, if you are Nike or whoever, Under Armour, and you've got a deal with the school, but you want a separate deal with like the quarterback or the running back or the star linebacker, that if that was legit, if that was outside, that's a legit NIL deal. There is an attestation about that. It's going to go through CSC (College Sports Commission) review, which it should. That wouldn't count against the cap but it can't be phony."

It was that seemingly simple distinction that nudged across support.

"You just can't have a phony redirection like we've seen a lot recently," Schmitt said. "I think once we did that and people had greater assurance that this was a really kind of a real cap, it's still allowing individual NIL deals. I think that was important. And then I was asked to and had a lot of conversations with Petitti (Friday), Randy Levine (a key member of Trump's college sports advisory council) in the White House. ... And then I was on the SEC call at the end there, walking through these various provisions and why I just think now's the time to move.

"We're at a place where there is a real sense of urgency now in college sports with what's going on in the trajectory, but our legislative calendar like that's just the reality of the situation. There is just not going to be a lot of time for this beyond this coming week."

The impending August recess, coupled by September's expected legislative priorities and October's mid-terms, Schmitt explained, made timing of this bill the second-biggest element beyond the ability to finally gain sign off from the Big Ten and SEC.

"I just think, culturally, college sports is very uniquely American and it brings us together," Schmitt said. "What is happening right now is not sustainable. If you want to see those half a million scholarships out there in men's and women's sports, that won't be the case in two years. So, I felt like we had to do it because our calendar, August is theoretically a recess. We could be there. I don't know, but September is going to be government funding debates, then you roll into elections, and you just don't know if you are going to get another shot at it. You just see this thing slipping away a little bit in college athletics. And if you kind of look down the road, it's at real risk. I was committed to it."

Nightengale

Continued from Page 1C

"I didn't want to play softball," she said. "I was upset by it. I wanted to play baseball. Softball is a completely different sport. It's like telling a tennis player to go play ping-pong. It's like people had the belief we didn't belong in baseball. But now, we arrived. I don't have to feel alone anymore."

Keith Stein, the WPBL co-founder along with Justine Siegal, was emotional and wiped away tears watching the women's first official workout Wednesday. He has long been an advocate of women's sports, and his interest in a league was heightened by the documentary "SEE HER BE HER" on women playing baseball around the world by Jean Fruth and Jeff Idelson, former president of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

"I don't think I had any clue about the magnitude what we were doing here," said Stein, a Toronto businessman. "I knew people wanted to see women who wanted to play this game. What I didn't understand was how this league would resonate in a broader way, symbolize certain things ... not even about baseball. A lot of people have been disappointed or angry for a long time, seeing young ladies not have the opportunities to play in a women's league in high school or college or pro. We wanted to change that."

That opportunity finally is here, and for the first time since 1954, the first all-women professional baseball league opened play between the Los Angeles Queens and the New York Heights on Aug. 1. The Queens scored four runs in the seventh to win 10-8. The Heights led 5-2 after the first inning and 8-4 after four, their final run coming on a home run by Denae Benites, who went 4-for-4. The San Francisco Firebells and Boston Hunters were set to play Sunday. The six-week season will be televised on ESPN, with 11 games simulcast on the Scripps Sports Network.

The teams are filled with star players, from Mo'ne Davis, who pitched a shutout in the Little League World Series, to Ayami Sato, considered the best female pitcher in the world who won six gold medals with the Japan women's national baseball team, and, of course, Whitmore, the pitcher/outfielder who won a silver medal at the Women's Baseball World Cup when she was 16 and a gold at the 2015 Pan American Games.

"I feel incredibly grateful and happy that I can finally stand on the stage I once only dreamed about," Saito said in a text message conveyed by Fruth. "To be able to play on this stage, a dream that once felt far away but became something I could truly see and believe in because of the people who supported me, means so much to me.

"I believe there are many players in this league who have carried the same dreams in their hearts, and I feel so fortunate and happy to be able to play alongside them."

The teams also are being managed by former MLB stars. Matt Williams, a five-time All-Star, four-time Gold Glove winner and 2014 manager of the year for the Washington Nationals, is managing San Francisco. Eric Young, an All-Star who coached 14 years in the big leagues, is managing Los Angeles. Keith Foulke, the All-Star reliever who closed out the 2004 World Series championship for the Boston Red Sox, will manage Boston. And Rachelle "Rocky" Henley, who founded the San Francisco Bay Sox girls baseball program and played for the barnstorming Colorado Silver Bullets, will manage New York.

Dave Stewart, the four-time 20-game winner and 1989 World Series MVP while becoming GM of the Arizona Diamondbacks, is an official adviser to the league.

Everyone realized the magnitude of this movement when the league had a tryout camp last August at Nationals Park in Washington, DC. There were 600 women from 10 countries who arrived, all paying their own expenses, just for the opportunity to play professional baseball.

Now, here they are, with the first game at the 5,000-seat stadium already sold out. Their original inventory of 20,000 caps were sold out in August 2025. They can't keep enough merchandise on the shelves.

"We see the success we're already having without a ball being thrown," Stein said. "There's money already coming in, but the money is completely secondary. I'm grateful to have the privilege to develop this league.

"There's nothing in business that's as meaningful as this. We want to leave a lasting impression and help change people's lives."

The WPBL is particularly gratifying for Fruth, who directed and produced the film "SEE HER BE HER" and traveled around the world to take photos of women playing baseball.

"The opening of the WPBL feels incredibly meaningful," says Fruth, co-founder of two nonprofit groups (Grassroots Baseball and See Her Be Her). "Over the past three years, making SEE HER BE HER has given me the privilege of documenting women's baseball around the world and witnessing firsthand the passion, resilience and determination of the athletes who have continued to push the game forward.

"What I'm most proud of isn't the film, it's the women taking the field and making this league a reality. What they're doing is bigger than baseball. Their impact reaches far beyond the game.

"It's about equality. It's about representation. It's about showing the next generation that there is a place for them in this sport and helping them believe that anything is possible."

Sure, no one is going to be rich playing in the league. The top salary is $500 per game that includes lodging and meals. The minimum is $300 per game.

Yet all that's important is that these women are allowed to achieve their dream of playing professional baseball. Whitmore never got the opportunity to realize her dream of playing with the San Diego Padres, wanting to be the next Jake Peavy, but she did play with the independent league Oakland Ballers and toured with the Savannah Bananas.

It just never made sense to Whitmore that there were professional women's sports in basketball (WNBA), hockey (PWHL) and soccer (NWSL), but not baseball. She was frustrated with MLB, wondering why it would sponsor and fund softball programs for girls and young women – but not for baseball.

"Women in baseball have been here all along," Whitmore said, "but we were always being mid-directed. It's like, Why do you have to play with men? Why can't you play softball?

"Well, now, a girl doesn't have to say there's no path for me to play baseball. We don't have to feel alone. I can look to my left, to my right, and not be the only girl. My goal is to play as long as I can and to help this league grow into something where young girls all over the world have a direction and a path to play baseball for a living.

"We have arrived.

"We are here.

"And we are staying here."

Dodgers may as well plan parade route

Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

Let the screaming and angst begin.

The Los Angeles Dodgers are landing Tarik Skubal.

The rich get richer.

You knew it was going to happen. The Dodgers weren't going to let Skubal get away, and they certainly weren't about to face him.

They had the money, and they had the prospects.

All it took was top pitching prospect River Ryan, outfielder Zyhir Hope, starter Brady Smith and $9.93 million to convince the Detroit Tigers there was no need to delay their decision and trade Skubal to the Dodgers.

Go ahead and start the parade route. Book it.

The Dodgers are going to three-peat.

You know it. Their rivals know it. And those demanding a salary cap know it.

The Dodgers tried to play coy throughout the process, saying they were just fine without Skubal and didn't need him.

Then, they looked in the mirror. Who were they kidding?

They had Yoshinobu Yamamoto and four question marks.

You really think they were going to let the Milwaukee Brewers grab him and team him with Jacob Misiorowski?

Or Atlanta with Chris Sale?

Nope.

They wanted nothing to do with the possibility of facing Skubal. And what's the best way to avoid that? Get him yourself.

Oh, and just to get any suspense out of the way – Skubal will be signing with the Dodgers as a free agent.

Everyone in favor of a salary cap will be using this as Exhibit A.

Yet the truth is that the Dodgers grabbed their man simply with prospects. This had nothing to do with money, but everything to do with the organization's talent.

In return, they've all but guaranteed themselves a World Series.

They've got Yoshinobu Yamamoto, Skubal, Shohei Ohtani, Blake Snell, Roki Sasaki, Justin Wrobleski, Tyler Glasnow, Emmet Sheehan and plenty of others.

You think anyone's going to knock these guys off?

Andrew Friedman, Dodgers president of baseball operations, tipped his hand earlier in the week when he said: "There just aren't many star-level players in the game. Any time one is available, we're always going to participate in those conversations."

So the Dodgers did just like that, like they traded for Mookie Betts, signed Freddie Freeman, and signed Ohtani, Snell, Edwin Diaz and Kyle Tucker.

Whoever the Dodgers want, they get.

They will be remembered forever in baseball history, becoming the first National League team to win three consecutive World Series championships.

No one is capable of stopping them.

It may be just the start of August, but it might as well be Nov. 1.

The World Series trophy is going to the Dodgers – who have the most money, the most prospects, the most talent and the smartest front office.

Everybody can yell about a salary cap. Bring it all on. The Dodgers don't care.

Their biggest thought now is clearing space for another World Series championship trophy.

See you at the parade.

Follow Bob Nightengale on X: @Bnightengale

TRADE GRADES

Los Angeles earns an A; Detroit gets B

Jesse Yomtov
USA TODAY

The Los Angeles Dodgers went out and did their thing, agreeing to a blockbuster trade with the Detroit Tigers for back-to-back Cy Young winner Tarik Skubal less than 48 hours before the MLB trade deadline.

Already the favorites to win a third consecutive World Series title, the Dodgers add the best player available in Skubal, who is a free agent at the end of the season and expected to command the biggest contract ever for a pitcher.

"They've got a good group," Skubal said of the Dodgers through tears after the Tigers game the night of Aug. 1. "I'm excited."

Los Angeles will send right-hander River Ryan, outfielder Zyhir Hope and righty Brady Smith to Detroit in the deal.

The Dodgers' National League rival Atlanta Braves and Milwaukee Brewers were expected to be among the potential suitors for Skubal, but this trade seemed to come together quickly on Saturday with news breaking while Detroit was playing.

This deal may set off a firestorm amid MLB's labor war and a 2027 lockout looking likely when the collective bargaining agreement expires this December. Owners are demanding a salary cap, purportedly for parity, very much to curb teams like the Dodgers from utilizing their alleged financial superiority.

But this was the Dodgers' first deadline trade of this magnitude in a half-decade, five years after getting Trea Turner and Max Scherzer only to be knocked out in the NL championship series the season after the COVID World Series win.

Here's a look at the trade that shakes up the balance of MLB power in 2026:

- **Dodgers receive**: LHP Tarik Skubal.
- **Tigers receive**: RHP River Ryan, OF Zyhir Hope, RHP Brady Smith.

Tarik Skubal is 61-42 in the regular season in his seventh season in the majors. RICK OSENTOSKI/IMAGN IMAGES

Dodgers trade grade: A

Skubal will immediately join World Series MVP Yoshinobu Yamamoto and 2026 All-Star Justin Wrobleski in the Dodgers rotation, while Tyler Glasnow and Blake Snell each try to make their way back from injury in the weeks to come.

Shohei Ohtani also hasn't pitched in weeks due to a knee issue, so the blockbuster takes a ton of weight off Yamamoto – and the currently sidelined pitchers – as the calendar flips to August.

Tigers trade grade: B

Not an awful return on a deal that had to come together quickly, landing one of the game's top prospects in Hope. But the Detroit regime will face questions after settling for Ryan, rather than say, Emmet Sheehan, as the MLB-ready pitcher coming back.

This was the best the Tigers could do with so much time still left on the clock before Monday's 6 p.m. ET trade deadline?

Injured pitchers soon might join Skubal in Dodgers' rotation

James H. Williams
USA TODAY

The Los Angeles Dodgers continue to assemble the strongest collection of pitchers in MLB.

Tarik Skubal became the latest addition to the Dodgers' pitching rotation after he was traded by the Detroit Tigers on Saturday Aug. 1.

The two-time American League Cy Young Award winner was the No. 1 option for the Tigers and had continued to make his case as the league's best pitcher.

Skubal was brought to Los Angeles with the intention of helping the Dodgers secure a third consecutive World Series title.

If manager Dave Roberts and the Dodgers can achieve the feat, they would become just the third organization to do so.

Dodgers' current rotation with trade addition of Tarik Skubal

The Dodgers' current rotation could be considered enough to lead Los Angeles through the playoffs.

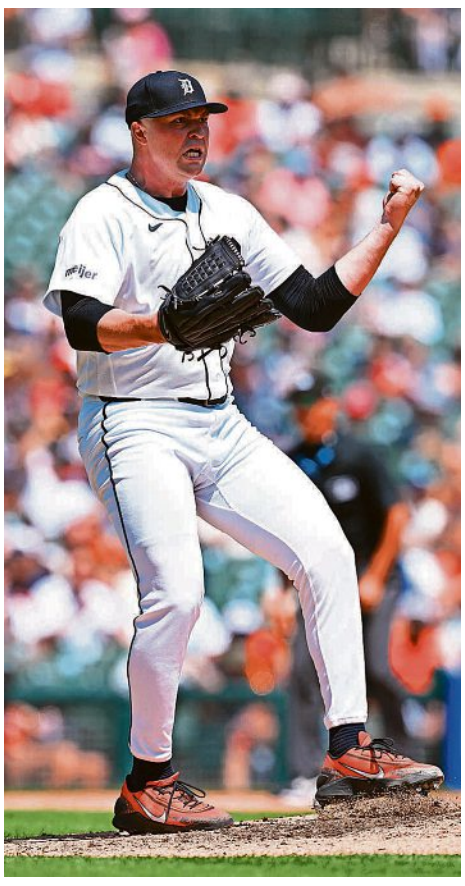
Skubal will immediately join a pitching rotation that currently includes Yoshinobu Yamamoto, Justin Wrobleski, Emmet Sheehan, Roki Sasaki and Eric Lauer.

Rotation when healthy

The Dodgers are striving to have a completely healthy rotation for the start of the playoffs.

Los Angeles' starting rotation could soon look different with Shohei Ohtani, Blake Snell and Tyler Glasnow all hoping to make it back later this season.

Pitchers such as Sheehan, Sasaki and Lauer would then be strong options out of the bullpen.



Tarik Skubal has 116 strikeouts in 96 ⅔ innings this season. LON HORWEDEL/IMAGN IMAGES

Two-way star Ohtani has not been back on the mound for an official start due to an ongoing knee issue since he was pulled from his scheduled start before the All-Star Game.

Another injury came to light earlier last week after Ohtani mentioned during his media availability that he's dealing with right biceps discomfort.

Snell and Glasnow are expected to participate in minor league rehab assignments later this week. If successful, both pitchers could be back in the rotation later in the month of August.

White Sox acquire 3-time All-Star pitcher Castillo

Gabe Lacques
USA TODAY

The Chicago White Sox did not have to prove they were legitimate playoff contenders, but they affirmed as much on Saturday Aug. 1 when they acquired right-handed pitcher Luis Castillo from

Castillo

the Seattle Mariners in exchange for reliever Seranthony Dominguez, former outfield prospect Nolan Jones and catching prospect Boston Smith, the team announced. The trade was made before the 6 p.m. ET deadline Aug. 3.

Castillo, 33, was expendable in Seattle thanks to the Mariners' deep rotation, a gaggle of majors-ready prospects and the $24.1 million salary he's due in 2027. He also hasn't performed particularly well this season, posting a 5.06 ERA in 20 appearances, 17 starts.

Yet Castillo is a three-time former All-Star who finished fifth in 2023 American League Cy Young Award voting and as recently as last season pitched 180 innings.

He'll add length to a White Sox rotation that thins out after No. 1 starter Sean Burke and Davis Martin.

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FOR THE RECORD

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MLB

AMERICAN LEAGUE
East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	65	45	.591	–
N.Y. Yankees	62	49	.559	3½
Boston	59	51	.536	6
Baltimore	54	57	.486	11½
Toronto	52	59	.468	13½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Chi. White Sox	58	52	.527	–
Minnesota	56	56	.500	3
Cleveland	56	56	.500	3
Detroit	53	58	.477	5½
Kansas City	46	66	.411	13

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	57	55	.509	–
Texas	55	56	.495	1½
Seattle	54	58	.482	3
Athletics	45	66	.405	11½
L.A. Angels	42	69	.378	14½

NATIONAL LEAGUE
East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	66	45	.595	–
Philadelphia	58	53	.523	8
Miami	57	55	.509	9½
Washington	55	57	.491	11½
N.Y. Mets	47	65	.420	19½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	69	41	.627	–
Chicago Cubs	63	48	.568	6½
Pittsburgh	56	56	.500	14
St. Louis	54	57	.486	15½
Cincinnati	52	58	.473	17

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Dodgers	69	42	.622	–
Arizona	59	52	.532	10
San Diego	57	54	.514	12
San Francisco	47	64	.423	22
Colorado	44	67	.396	25

Saturday's Scores
Toronto 5, St. Louis 1
Tampa Bay 1, Chi. White Sox 0
Seattle 4, Minnesota 3
Miami 6, N.Y. Mets 2
Pittsburgh 4, Cincinnati 1
Philadelphia 5, Baltimore 0
Houston 5, Texas 4
Atlanta 8, Washington 3
Arizona 12, Cleveland 8
Chicago Cubs 5, N.Y. Yankees 2
Colorado 12, Kansas City 6
San Diego 6, San Francisco 5
Boston 3, L.A. Dodgers 2
Milwaukee 3, L.A. Angels 1
Detroit 8, Athletics 6

Sunday's Games
Washington at Atlanta
Philadelphia at Baltimore
St. Louis at Toronto
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati
Chi. White Sox at Tampa Bay
Arizona at Cleveland
Miami at N.Y. Mets
Texas at Houston
N.Y. Yankees at Chicago Cubs
Kansas City at Colorado
Milwaukee at L.A. Angels
Detroit at Athletics
Minnesota at Seattle
San Francisco at San Diego
Boston at L.A. Dodgers

Monday's Games
Washington at Philadelphia, 6:40 p.m.
St. Louis at N.Y. Yankees, 7:05 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Milwaukee, 7:40 p.m.
San Francisco at Texas, 8:05 p.m.
L.A. Dodgers at Chicago Cubs, 8:05 p.m.
Toronto at Houston, 8:10 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Colorado, 8:40 p.m.
San Diego at Arizona, 9:40 p.m.

Tuesday's Games
L.A. Angels at Baltimore, 6:35 p.m.
Athletics at Cincinnati, 6:40 p.m.
N.Y. Mets at Cleveland, 6:40 p.m.
Washington at Philadelphia, 6:40 p.m.
St. Louis at N.Y. Yankees, 7:05 p.m.
Chi. White Sox at Boston, 7:10 p.m.
Miami at Atlanta, 7:15 p.m.
Minnesota at Kansas City, 7:40 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Milwaukee, 7:40 p.m.
San Francisco at Texas, 8:05 p.m.
L.A. Dodgers at Chicago Cubs, 8:05 p.m.
Toronto at Houston, 8:10 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Colorado, 8:40 p.m.
San Diego at Arizona, 9:40 p.m.
Detroit at Seattle, 9:40 p.m.

Wednesday's Games
Toronto at Houston, 2:10 p.m.
L.A. Dodgers at Chicago Cubs, 2:20 p.m.
San Francisco at Texas, 2:35 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Colorado, 3:10 p.m.
L.A. Angels at Baltimore, 6:35 p.m.
Athletics at Cincinnati, 6:40 p.m.
N.Y. Mets at Cleveland, 6:40 p.m.
Washington at Philadelphia, 6:40 p.m.
St. Louis at N.Y. Yankees, 7:05 p.m.
Chi. White Sox at Boston, 7:10 p.m.
Miami at Atlanta, 7:15 p.m.
Minnesota at Kansas City, 7:40 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Milwaukee, 7:40 p.m.
San Diego at Arizona, 9:40 p.m.
Detroit at Seattle, 9:40 p.m.

Thursday's Games
L.A. Angels at Baltimore, 12:35 p.m.
Athletics at Cincinnati, 12:40 p.m.
N.Y. Mets at Cleveland, 1:10 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Milwaukee, 2:10 p.m.
Toronto at Chicago Cubs, 2:20 p.m.
Detroit at Seattle, 4:10 p.m.
Washington at Philadelphia, 6:05 p.m.
Chi. White Sox at Boston, 7:10 p.m.
Miami at Atlanta, 7:15 p.m.
Minnesota at Kansas City, 7:40 p.m.
San Diego at Arizona, 9:40 p.m.

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Indiana	19	10	.655	–
Atlanta	18	10	.643	½
Washington	16	12	.571	2½
N.Y. Liberty	17	13	.567	2½
Chicago	11	18	.379	8
Toronto	10	18	.357	8½
Connecticut	7	22	.241	12

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	24	6	.800	–
Las Vegas	20	9	.690	3½
Golden State	19	9	.679	4
Dallas	18	11	.621	5½
Portland	11	18	.379	12½
L.A. Sparks	10	17	.370	12½
Phoenix	11	19	.367	13
Seattle	6	25	.194	18½

Friday's Scores
Atlanta 98, Seattle 89
Washington 81, Dallas 75
Indiana 112, Portland 98

Saturday's Scores
Chicago 84, Las Vegas 83
N.Y. Liberty 94, Phoenix 92

Sunday's Games
Indiana at Minnesota
L.A. Sparks at Portland
Connecticut at Dallas
Toronto at Golden State

Monday's Games
Las Vegas at Atlanta, 7 p.m.
Seattle at N.Y. Liberty, 7 p.m.
Phoenix at Chicago, 9 p.m.

Tuesday's Game
Toronto at Golden State, 10 p.m.

Wednesday's Games
Phoenix at Atlanta, 7 p.m.
Seattle at N.Y. Liberty, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Washington, 7:30 p.m.
L.A. Sparks at Chicago, 9 p.m.

CFL

EAST DIVISION

	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
Montreal	7	1	.875	273	217
Toronto	3	4	.429	220	219
Hamilton	3	5	.375	186	234
Ottawa	0	7	.000	166	247

WEST DIVISION

	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
Edmonton	6	2	.750	229	200
Saskatchewan	5	2	.714	232	195
Calgary	4	4	.500	322	264
Winnipeg	4	4	.500	204	243
BC	2	5	.286	187	201

Thursday's Score
BC 35, Winnipeg 19

Friday's Score
Montreal 34, Ottawa 13

Saturday's Scores
Calgary 44, Hamilton 20
Saskatchewan 28, Edmonton 26

Thursday's Game
Calgary vs. Toronto, 7:30 p.m.

Friday's Game
Ottawa vs. Saskatchewan, 9 p.m.

Saturday's Games
Edmonton vs. Montreal, 3 p.m.
Hamilton vs. BC, 7 p.m.

SOCCER

NWSL

	W	L	D	Pts	GF	GA
Gotham	11	3	4	37	23	12
Washington	11	3	3	36	26	12
Utah	9	5	3	30	26	18
Kansas City	9	7	2	29	29	25
San Diego	9	6	2	29	23	19
Portland	8	5	4	28	27	20
North Carolina	7	6	3	24	26	23
Angel City	7	7	2	23	24	17
Seattle	7	7	2	23	19	20
Orlando	7	9	2	23	22	26
Denver	5	6	4	19	21	20
Boston	5	8	4	19	18	23
Houston	5	8	4	19	19	25
Bay	5	9	3	18	17	23
Louisville	4	11	2	14	21	34
Chicago	4	13	0	12	9	33

Note: Three points for win, one point for tie.

Friday's Score
North Carolina 5, Orlando 0

Saturday's Scores
Louisville 2, Chicago 1
Kansas City 1, Angel City 1
Gotham 1, Houston 0
Seattle 3, Bay 2

Sunday's Games
San Diego at Washington
Portland at Utah
Boston at Denver

Wednesday's Game
North Carolina at Denver, 10 p.m.

Friday's Games
Louisville at Orlando, 7 p.m.
San Diego at Gotham, 8 p.m.

Saturday's Games
Utah at Denver, 4 p.m.
North Carolina at Washington, 6:30 p.m.

MLS
EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Nashville	12	2	4	40	35	14
Inter Miami CF	11	2	5	38	45	32
New England	9	5	3	30	28	21
Chicago	9	6	2	29	32	23
NY City FC	7	6	5	26	31	24
Cincinnati	7	6	5	26	45	44
Charlotte FC	7	7	4	25	29	27
NY Red Bulls	7	7	4	25	29	39
D.C. United	5	5	8	23	26	29
Orlando City	6	10	2	20	30	47
Columbus	5	8	5	20	26	28
Toronto FC	3	7	8	17	24	32
Philadelphia	4	10	4	16	25	33
CF Montreal	4	10	4	16	24	35
Atlanta	3	12	3	12	19	33

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	10	3	4	34	38	17
Los Angeles FC	10	5	4	34	35	19
San Jose	10	5	3	33	37	24
Houston	9	6	2	29	25	24
Real Salt Lake	8	6	3	27	29	25
FC Dallas	7	5	6	27	32	25
Saint Louis	7	6	5	26	24	24
Portland	7	8	3	24	33	33
Seattle	7	7	3	24	20	22
Minnesota	6	6	6	24	20	25
Colorado	7	10	1	22	27	25
LA Galaxy	5	7	7	22	24	29
San Diego FC	5	7	6	21	32	29
Austin FC	4	9	5	17	22	36
Sporting KC	4	12	2	14	18	46

Note: Three points for win, one point for tie.

Friday's Score
NY City FC 1, Toronto FC 1

Saturday's Scores
D.C. United 2, Nashville 2
Philadelphia 3, Atlanta 2
CF Montreal 2, New England 2
NY Red Bulls 3, Orlando City 2
Vancouver 1, Los Angeles FC 1
Inter Miami CF 2, Columbus 2
Chicago 2, Charlotte FC 1
Sporting KC 0, Houston 2
Saint Louis 1, Real Salt Lake 1
Minnesota 1, San Diego FC 1
Colorado 1, Austin FC 0
Cincinnati 4, San Jose 2
LA Galaxy 0, FC Dallas 0
Portland 2, Seattle 1

Saturday's Game
New England vs. Houston, 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, August 15
Atlanta vs. NY Red Bulls, 7:30 p.m.
CF Montreal vs. D.C. United, 7:30 p.m.
Charlotte FC vs. Columbus, 7:30 p.m.
Orlando vs. FC Cincinnati, 7:30 p.m.
Toronto FC vs. New England, 7:30 p.m.
Houston vs. LA Galaxy, 8:30 p.m.
Nashville SC vs. Inter Miami, 8:30 p.m.
Colorado vs. Sporting KC, 9:30 p.m.
Real Salt Lake vs. Minnesota, 9:30 p.m.
LAFC vs. San Diego FC, 10:30 p.m.
San Jose vs. St. Louis, 10:30 p.m.

Left to right, CONCACAF President Victor Montagliani, FIFA President Gianni Infantino and Confederation of African Football (CAF) President Patrice Motsepe, and South African Football Association (SAFA) President Danny Jordaan attend the World Cup Round of 32 match between South Africa and Canada on June 28. ETIENNE LAURENT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

CONCACAF takes aim at FIFA President Infantino

Seth Vertelney
USA TODAY

CONCACAF has taken aim directly at FIFA President Gianni Infantino, who scrapped his controversial plan to sell off a stake in the organization to private investors.

Infantino introduced his proposal on Tuesday July 28, but after a massive backlash – led in part by CONCACAF – he admitted defeat on Friday July 31.

UEFA led the charge against the proposal, saying it would boycott FIFA competitions until it was scrapped. CONCACAF also announced it would reject the plan on Thursday.

On Saturday, UEFA said that it no longer had confidence in Infantino to lead FIFA. Just hours later, CONCACAF followed with a similar statement.

"The events of recent days have exposed something that cannot now be set aside: the future of the FIFA World Cup, the greatest asset in world football, was advanced outside every established governance framework, without transparency, consultation or due process," the statement read.

"A proposal of this magnitude does not reach that stage by accident. It is a symptom of leadership that has stopped putting football first. This recent unilateral and egregious act of poor governance and leadership follows a pattern of missteps and similar behavior.

"A comprehensive reckoning with this presidency is imperative."

CONCACAF's complaint over Infantino operating unilaterally was shared in an extraordinary statement from FIFA chief operating officer Kevin Lamour on Friday.

Lamour said the controversial proposal was "the project of one person" and said "the time has now come for football political leaders to ask themselves the right questions and make the right decisions."

Former U.S. Soccer president Carlos Cordeiro, who was a senior adviser for Infantino, quit on Friday due to the proposal.

"I cannot stand by while FIFA considers selling a stake in the World Cup," Cordeiro said. "Let me be clear. I had no involvement in this proposal, and I oppose it unequivocally."

Infantino is up for re-election in March.

According to a report in The i Paper, CONCACAF President and FIFA Council vice president Victor Montagliani is considering a run to challenge him.

WEATHER

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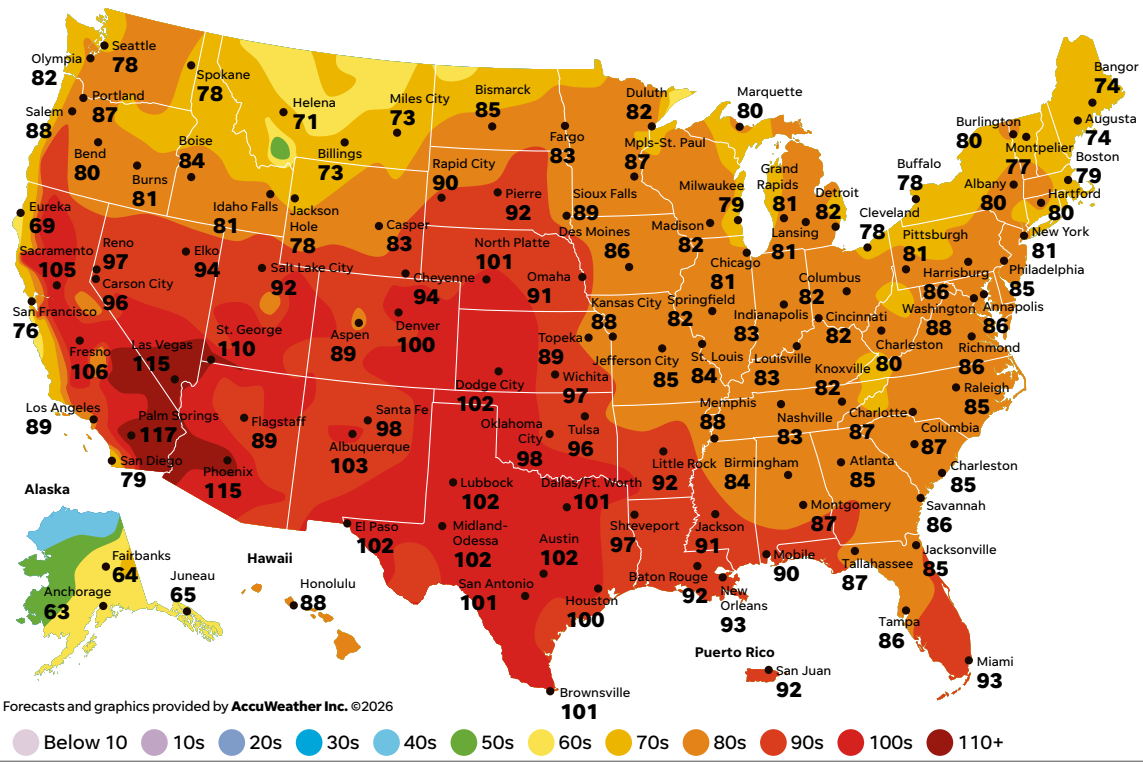
TODAY'S FORECAST

Showers and heavy thunderstorms will erupt from the **Southeast** to the **Northeast** today. Some thunderstorms may be heavy enough to produce localized flooding from **Maryland** to **Massachusetts**. Dry weather with a mostly sunny sky is expected from the **Mississippi Valley** to the **Plains**.

Temperatures in the **Mississippi Valley** will run below average, but temperatures across the **Plains** and the **Rockies** will remain in the 90s and low 100s. Severe thunderstorms will rumble from eastern **South Dakota** to western **Minnesota** and may produce hail and damaging wind gusts.

It will be windy and cooler across the northern **Rockies**. Temperatures will run well above average in the **Southwest**. An onshore breeze will keep temperatures lower along the **Pacific** Coast.

TODAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



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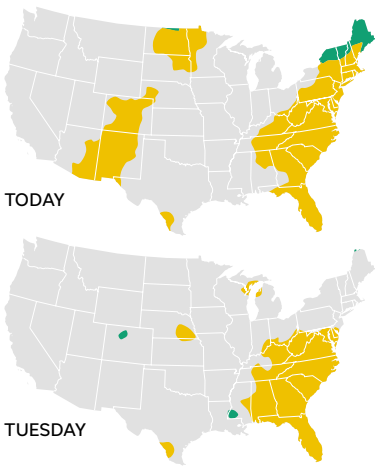
PRECIPITATION FORECAST

T-storms Rain Snow Ice/mix



EXTREMES

Note: For contiguous 48 states through Saturday

HOTTEST: 121° Death Valley, Calif.
COLDEST: 37° Truckee, Calif.

TOP TRAVEL CITIES Air quality index **(AQI)**

ATLANTA	BALTIMORE	BOSTON	CHARLOTTE	CHICAGO	DALLAS/FT. WORTH	DENVER	DETROIT	HONOLULU	HOUSTON	LAS VEGAS	LOS ANGELES
MON Stray t-storm 85/71	MON T-storms 87/69	MON T-storms 79/67	MON T-storms 87/72	MON Sunny, nice 81/64	MON Sunny, hot 101/80	MON Stray t-storm 100/59	MON Mostly sunny 82/59	MON Showers around 88/75	MON Hot 100/78	MON Very hot 115/88	MON Mostly sunny 89/68
TUE T-storms 84/72	TUE T-storms 85/71	TUE Partly sunny 85/69	TUE T-storms 84/72	TUE Mostly sunny 85/68	TUE Sunny, hot 102/83	TUE Stray t-storm 80/57	TUE Mostly sunny 82/61	TUE A few showers 87/75	TUE Hazy sun, warm 97/78	TUE Hot 114/87	TUE Mostly sunny 88/67
WED Partly sunny 86/73	WED T-storms 89/74	WED Shower 83/72	WED T-storms 86/71	WED More humid 81/68	WED Hot 102/80	WED Mostly sunny 85/60	WED More humid 86/66	WED Showers 88/77	WED Very warm 97/79	WED Hot 112/89	WED Mostly sunny 85/68
AQI Good	AQI Good	AQI Good	AQI Good	AQI Moderate	AQI Unhealthy s/g	AQI Unhealthy s/g	AQI Moderate	AQI Good	AQI Moderate	AQI Moderate	AQI Moderate

MIAMI	MPLS-ST. PAUL	NEW ORLEANS	NEW YORK	ORLANDO	PHILADELPHIA	PHOENIX	SALT LAKE CITY	SAN DIEGO	SAN FRANCISCO	SEATTLE	WASHINGTON
MON A P.M. t-storm 93/79	MON Breezy 87/68	MON Partly sunny 93/77	MON T-storms 81/71	MON Heavy t-storms 88/75	MON T-storms 85/71	MON Hot 115/92	MON Hazy sunshine 92/66	MON Partly sunny 79/70	MON Mostly sunny 76/56	MON Hazy sunshine 78/60	MON T-storms 88/73
TUE T-storms 91/78	TUE Stray t-storm 81/60	TUE Stray t-storm 94/78	TUE Sunny spells 84/72	TUE Heavy t-storms 89/76	TUE Stray t-storm 87/73	TUE Hazy sun, hot 111/91	TUE Hazy sunshine 92/65	TUE Humid 77/69	TUE Sunny, nice 74/58	TUE Hazy sunshine 87/62	TUE T-storms 85/72
WED A P.M. t-storm 91/79	WED Partly sunny 82/62	WED Partly sunny 93/78	WED A few showers 83/73	WED A P.M. t-storm 90/74	WED T-storms 87/73	WED Stray t-shower 109/89	WED Hazy sunshine 95/70	WED Humid 78/69	WED Sunny, nice 73/58	WED Very warm 90/61	WED T-storms 88/75
AQI Good	AQI Good	AQI Moderate	AQI Good	AQI Good	AQI Good	AQI Moderate	AQI Unhealthy s/g	AQI Moderate	AQI Moderate	AQI Unhealthy s/g	AQI Good

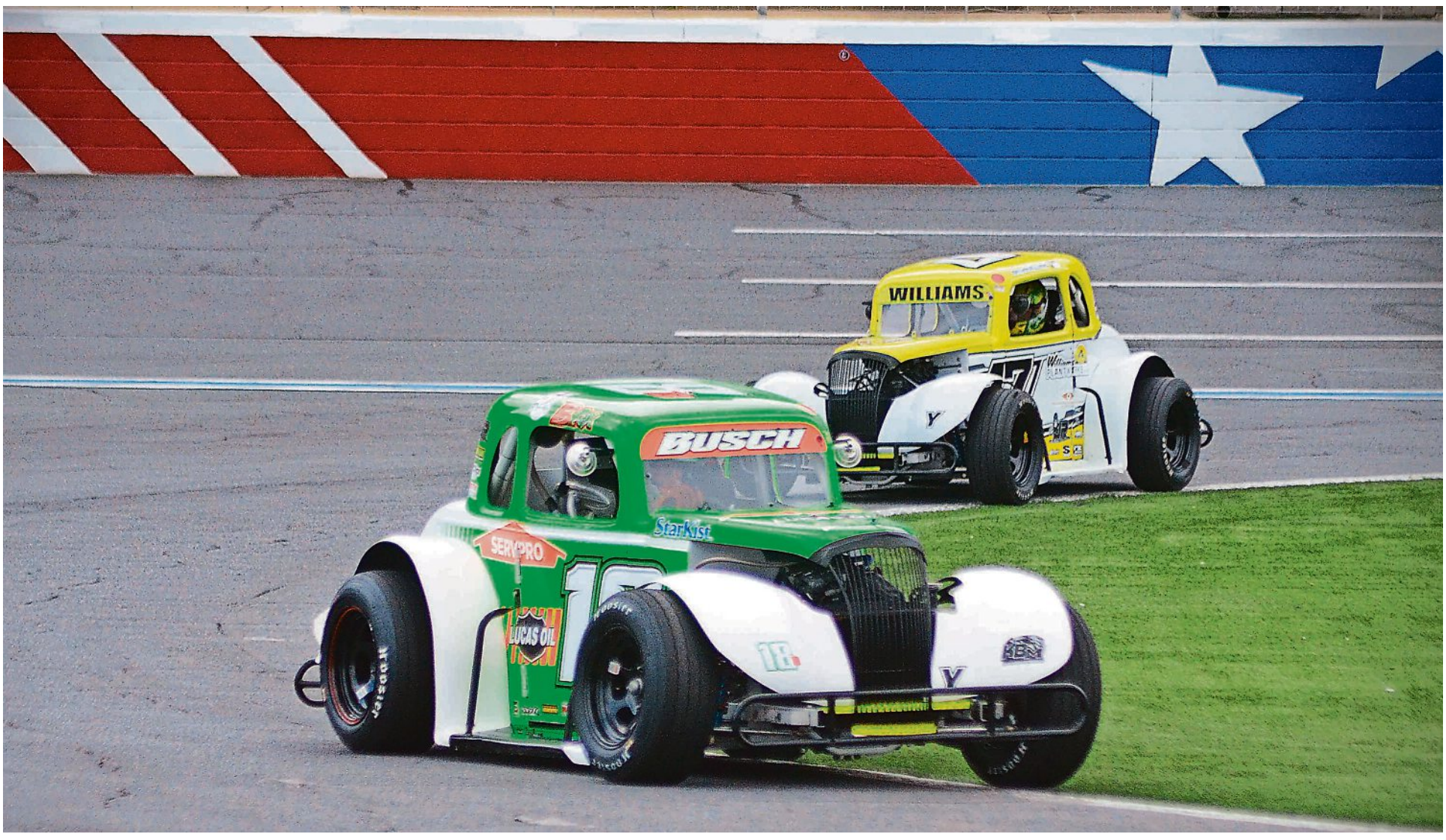
c Cloudy **f** Fog **i** Ice **r** Rain **sf** Snowflurries **sn** Snow **w** Windy **dr** Drizzle **h** Haze **pc** Partly cloudy **s** Sunny **sh** Showers **t** Thunderstorms

U.S. CITIES

	TODAY	TUE
Akron, Ohio	78/56pc	82/64s
Albany, N.Y.	80/62t	85/62pc
Albuquerque	103/74t	99/71t
Allentown, Pa.	83/61t	84/65pc
Amarillo, Texas	104/73s	100/71pc
Anaheim, Calif.	90/67s	87/68s
Anchorage, Alaska	63/57r	63/55sh
Aspen, Colo.	89/54t	89/50pc
Atlantic City, N.J.	80/70t	82/73t
Augusta, Ga.	88/71t	89/70t
Austin, Texas	102/75s	102/77s
Bakersfield, Calif.	107/77s	108/78s
Baton Rouge, La.	92/73pc	93/75t
Billings, Mont.	73/51h	78/52h
Birmingham, Ala.	84/69t	88/72t
Bismarck, N.D.	85/49t	81/47h
Boise, Idaho	84/54h	90/58h
Buffalo, N.Y.	78/58pc	82/63s
Burlington, Vt.	80/60sh	85/63s
Cedar Rapids, Iowa	82/62s	84/66pc
Charleston, S.C.	85/75t	88/77t
Charleston, W.Va.	80/64t	84/66t
Cheyenne, Wyo.	94/50pc	71/52pc
Cincinnati	82/63pc	84/66t
Cleveland	78/56pc	81/65s
Colorado Springs	99/62t	83/57t
Columbia, S.C.	87/74t	87/72t
Columbus, Ohio	82/60pc	85/67s
Corpus Christi, Texas	99/78s	96/79s
Dayton, Ohio	79/58pc	83/65s
Daytona Beach, Fla.	88/76t	86/75t
Des Moines, Iowa	86/66s	86/63pc
Duluth, Minn.	82/62c	77/51pc
Durham, N.C.	84/73t	82/73t
El Paso, Texas	102/78t	106/77t
Fairbanks, Alaska	64/54r	75/54c
Flagstaff, Ariz.	89/59s	89/59pc
Fargo, N.D.	83/55t	77/53pc
Fort Myers, Fla.	91/78t	91/75t
Fort Smith, Ark.	96/73pc	101/74s
Fort Wayne, Ind.	81/57s	83/59s
Fresno, Calif.	106/73s	104/72h
Grand Rapids, Mich.	81/58s	85/63s
Green Bay, Wis.	82/61s	83/64t
Greensboro, N.C.	84/71t	81/70t
Greenville, S.C.	87/69t	85/70t
Harrisburg, Pa.	86/66t	87/70pc
Hartford, Conn.	80/62t	87/63pc
Indianapolis	83/62s	85/65s
Islip, N.Y.	79/67t	84/70pc
Jackson, Miss.	91/71pc	95/72sh
Jacksonville, Fla.	85/75t	89/73t
Jefferson City, Mo.	85/66s	89/67s
Kansas City	88/65s	90/69s
Key West, Fla.	90/83pc	91/82t
Knoxville, Tenn.	82/69t	85/68t
Laredo, Texas	104/80s	104/80s
Lexington, Ky.	82/63pc	85/67t
Lincoln, Neb.	91/69s	84/61pc
Little Rock, Ark.	92/70pc	96/72s
Long Beach, Calif.	85/69pc	84/68s
Louisville, Ky.	83/66pc	87/70t
Lubbock, Texas	102/74s	100/74s
Madison, Wis.	82/61s	82/65s
Manchester, N.H.	77/61t	87/63pc
Memphis, Tenn.	88/71pc	90/73s
Milwaukee	79/63s	83/68s
Mobile, Ala.	90/73sh	92/74t
Modesto, Calif.	104/67s	100/65s
Montgomery, Ala.	87/70pc	89/72t
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	83/76t	84/78t
Nags Head, N.C.	80/75t	81/76t
Nashville, Tenn.	83/69t	89/70t
Newark, N.J.	84/70t	87/71pc
New Haven, Conn.	78/66t	84/66pc
Norfolk, Va.	84/74t	82/74t
Oakland, Calif.	79/56s	75/56s
Oklahoma City	98/71s	102/74s
Omaha, Neb.	91/69s	82/61pc
Palm Springs, Calif.	117/87s	115/87s
Pensacola, Fla.	89/75sh	89/78t
Pierre, S.D.	92/54w	79/56pc
Pittsburgh	81/58pc	85/69pc
Portland, Maine	75/60t	85/60s
Portland, Ore.	87/59h	99/62h
Providence, R.I.	77/62t	85/64pc
Raleigh, N.C.	85/75t	84/73t
Rapid City, S.D.	90/51w	80/54pc
Reno, Nev.	97/62s	101/68s
Richmond, Va.	86/72t	83/73t
Rochester, N.Y.	77/57c	81/61s
Sacramento, Calif.	105/61s	100/59s
San Antonio	101/78s	101/78s
San Jose, Calif.	89/60s	86/60s
Santa Fe, N.M.	98/63t	94/62t
Sarasota, Fla.	90/78t	88/75t
Savannah, Ga.	86/74t	90/74t
Scottsdale, Ariz.	113/89pc	108/87h
Shreveport, La.	97/75s	100/77s
Sioux Falls, S.D.	89/61w	76/55t
South Bend, Ind.	81/57s	83/61s
Spokane, Wash.	78/56h	85/56h
Springfield, Mo.	88/68s	93/71s
Springfield, Ill.	82/62pc	85/62s
St. Louis	84/68pc	89/69s
St. Petersburg, Fla.	86/77t	88/77t
Syracuse, N.Y.	78/61c	85/64s
Tallahassee, Fla.	87/71t	90/71t
Tampa, Fla.	86/79t	89/77t
Toledo, Ohio	82/55s	84/60s
Topeka, Kan.	89/66s	93/71pc
Tucson, Ariz.	106/83t	106/80t
Tupelo, Miss.	87/69pc	90/71s
Tulsa, Okla.	96/72s	101/78s
Virginia Beach, Va.	82/76t	80/76t
Wichita, Kan.	97/71s	102/76pc
Wilmington, Del.	85/68t	86/69t
Winston-Salem, N.C.	85/71t	82/69t
Worcester, Mass.	75/63t	81/65pc

WORLD CITIES

	TODAY	TUE
Beijing	93/76t	92/76t
Buenos Aires	61/54c	60/54pc
Cancun, Mexico	95/79t	94/76r
Dubai, UAE	112/95s	116/98s
Frankfurt	95/70s	97/69pc
Hong Kong	84/79sh	85/79r
Istanbul	88/72s	90/72s
Jerusalem	91/71s	89/70s
Johannesburg	67/38s	68/39s
London	93/64pc	82/63sh
Mexico City	78/57sh	79/57r
Montreal	76/62r	83/63s
Moscow	77/57pc	78/61pc
Mumbai, India	87/80r	86/81r
Paris	95/70h	89/67s
Rio de Janeiro	78/67c	79/70h
Rome	92/71pc	92/71s
Seoul	97/80t	100/81t
Singapore	91/80r	91/80t
Sydney	74/46pc	66/45s
Toronto	80/58pc	81/62s
Tokyo	83/73c	85/74c



In the lime green No. 18, Brexton Busch, son of the late NASCAR champion Kyle Busch, works his way around a corner during practice before a Legends race July 28 at Charlotte Motor Speedway. PHOTOS BY MITCHELL NORTHAM/USA TODAY SPORTS

Summertime pursuit

Family roots drive 11-year-old Brexton Busch

Mitchell Northam
USA TODAY

CONCORD, NC – The boy is smiling as he emerges from a long black trailer attached to a white Ford Super Duty pickup truck. It's a hot, sticky summer day at Charlotte Motor Speedway with temperatures rising above 90 degrees, but 11-year-old Brexton Busch is happy. As long as the rain holds off, in about an hour he'll be in his comfort zone: behind the wheel of his race car.

On this night of July 28, the weekly Cook Out Summer Shootout is coming to an end for the season with its championship. The series is one for Legends cars, one of the many youth pathways in racing that eventually lead to NASCAR, where Brexton's father Kyle became a superstar – winning a whole lot of races and a few championships.

Legends are designed to replicate old-style cars from the 1930s on a five-eighths scale. They run on motorcycle engines and typically top-out at 140 mph. Of course, they're still dangerous, as Brexton learned here a week ago when he crashed. But his confidence remains unshaken – on this day, he's looking forward to being in the driver's seat.

With time to kill before his race begins, Brexton goes to find a snack. He returns to a makeshift pit stall area where his No. 18 Legends car is parked next to a few others. There are several camping chairs scattered around and Brexton's grandfather Tom sits in one, sipping a Diet Mountain Dew, wearing faded blue jeans and a short-sleeve button-up shirt covered with classic cars. Decades ago, when he was a mechanic and short-track driver in Las Vegas, Tom was taking Brexton's father, Kyle, and his uncle Kurt out to races like this one, tutoring them before they became the winningest brothers in NASCAR history.

Brexton picks a chair a few yards in front of his grandfather that has a good view of the jumbotron videoboard showing the racing of the Bandoleros – miniature stock cars with go-kart-like mechanics. Brexton plops down and starts eating a bowl of sliced pickles with a plastic fork as he watches the race. Within minutes, the bowl is empty and he slurps down the pickle juice that remains.

A helmet and a pair of orange racing gloves sit atop Brexton's No. 18 machine. Even if he wasn't the son of a two-time NASCAR Cup Series champion, his car would be easy to spot with a lime green paint scheme that stands out in the field – not to mention the giant decal of Charlie the Tuna, the mascot for StarKist, plastered on the trunk.

One of the garage veterans mentoring Brexton and working on his cars is "Big Al" Scroggins, a highly regarded longtime dirt-racing crew chief. It's his birthday, so a few balloons and a small cake are situated on a folding table near the No. 18. Brexton is knocking the balloons back and forth with another crewmember and jokes about sucking the helium out of one of them to make his voice sound funny before his post-race interview. The older men laugh, but tell him no.

His uncle, NASCAR Hall of Fame inductee Kurt Busch, arrives wearing a Monster Energy T-shirt and camo shorts. The 2017 Daytona 500 winner munches on sunflower seeds and sips on a Gatorade as he gives his nephew's car a once-over, checking the tires and suspension.

It's now time for Brexton to strap into his ride. He pulls on his helmet and gloves, then climbs in. Aaron Bowes, who has been a crew chief and mentor for Brexton, leans into the car and gives the driver some last-minute pointers and advice. Then his mother, Samantha Busch, walks over with his younger sister Lennix. Samantha kneels down, grabbing his right hand with her left as she says a quiet prayer. As Brexton pulls off toward the starting grid, uncle Kurt gives him a confident nod.

For an average fan watching this from afar, it's difficult to not wonder where Brexton's father would be in all this had he not suddenly died on May 21 at the age of 41 due to complications from sepsis caused by presumed bacterial pneumonia. Six days before he died, Kyle Busch was celebrating with Brexton on the track at Dover where he had just won his record 234th race across NASCAR's top three national touring series.

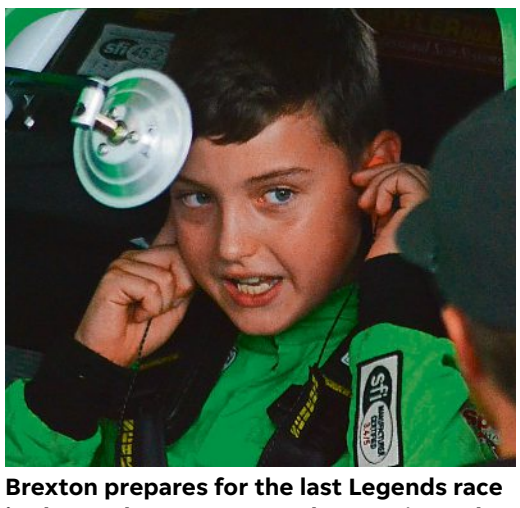
Kyle Busch's death shook the sport, but it's clear on this day that it hasn't broken the Busch family. They're all here, all rallying around Brexton, who carries the same dreams his dad did of being a race car driver. Here, at Charlotte Motor Speedway, he is insulated from the world. In the infield, he's simply a kid. And when he puts on the helmet and straps into his machine, he is – like all the other competitors out there – a budding race car driver.

On the track though, it's hard to ignore his bloodlines. Like any other driver who has the Busch name on their car, Brexton shows speed, competitiveness and craft. After falling back as far as 12th in the Legends race, he gets a good run on a restart and battles his way up to a sixth-place finish.

After the race, like any kid who didn't win would be, Brexton is a bit upset. Uncle Kurt throws his arm around him and Bowes gives him some constructive criticism. Another young driver, Jackson Fooks, walks over and gives Brexton a hug.

Following the debrief, family and friends gather to sing "Happy Birthday" to Big Al. The No. 18 machine is loaded into the long black trailer, while Brexton's helmet and fire suit are carried away by Bowes.

Brexton has changed into a pair of shorts and a black polo. It's starting to rain, but he jogs over to the table and grabs a slice of birthday cake, then disappears into the parking lot and the possibilities of this summer night.



Brexton prepares for the last Legends race in the Cook Out Summer Shootout's 33rd season at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Above: Before the race, NASCAR Hall of Famer Kurt Busch inspects the car his nephew Brexton Busch will be driving in the Legends race.

Samantha Busch says a prayer with son Brexton before his race July 28.

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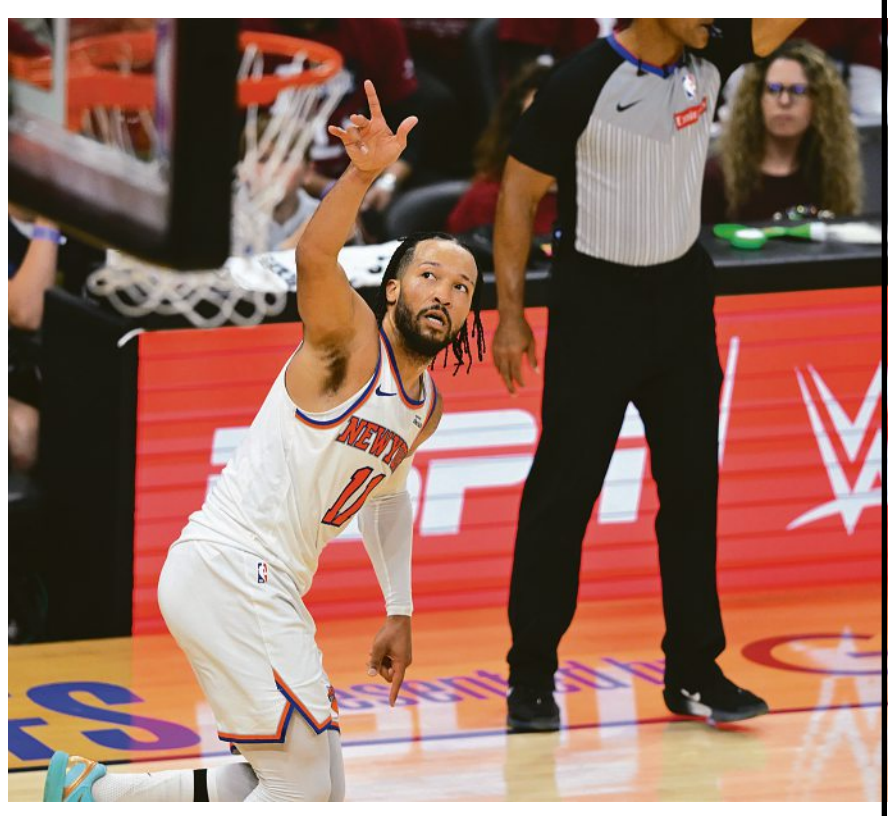
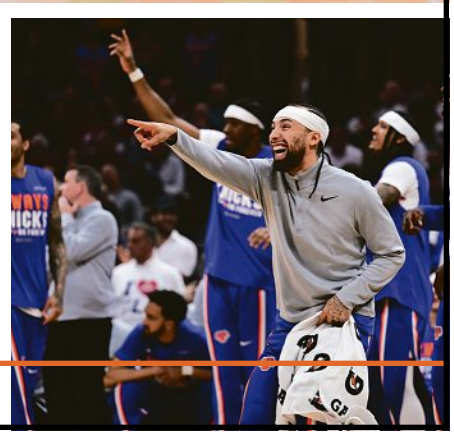




USA TODAY SPORTS

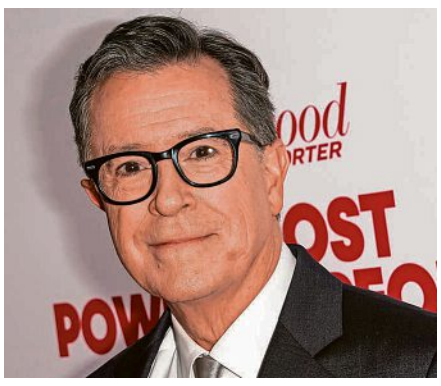
In ‘New Day,’ Spider-Man grapples with growing up

Navigating life’s big transitions can be difficult, even for a superhero. **Page 2D**

John Mellencamp revisits his hits on Dancing Worlds Tour

The grizzled veteran rocker still displays his rebellious spirit onstage. **Page 4D**

LIFELINE



EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

HOW WAS YOUR DAY?
STEPHEN COLBERT

Stephen Colbert now has another award to add to his résumé. The former “Late Show” host has been announced as one of the recipients of the 47th annual American Book Awards. He will be presented the anti-censorship honor by the Before Columbus Foundation in a Sept. 26 ceremony at the University of California, Berkeley. The award comes after Colbert signed off “The Late Show,” which was controversially canceled by CBS, in May. Mitchell Kaplan, founder of the Florida independent bookstore Books & Books, also will receive the prize. The awards recognize “outstanding literary achievement from the entire spectrum of America’s diverse literary community.”

IT’S YOUR BIRTHDAY
WHO’S CELEBRATING TODAY

Sheen

Actor **Martin Sheen** turns 86. Entrepreneur **Martha Stewart**, 85. Director **John Landis**, 76. Singer **James Hetfield** (Metallica), 63. Singer-songwriter **Ed Roland** (Collective Soul), 63. Actor **Lisa Ann Walter**, 63. Actor **Isaiah Washington**, 63. Guitarist **Stephen Carpenter** (Deftones), 56. **DJ Spinderella**, 56. Actor **Evangeline Lilly**, 47. Actor **Mamie Gummer**, 43. Actor **Georgina Haig**, 41. Model **Karlie Kloss**, 34.
– USA TODAY Network

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Aries (March 21-April 19). When did money start becoming so important to you? Consider how your behavior has shifted since the end of June.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Hold up. Why so self-conscious? Chiron retrograde asks you to reflect on key life events since the end of June.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Have you made a habit of talking yourself down recently? Chiron retrograde asks you to recognize the pattern!

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Feeling socially outcast? It’s mostly in your head, but Chiron retrograde will offer clarity on an edgy friend dynamic.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Questioning your potential? Since when?! Chiron retrograde wakes you up out of a self-conscious trance. Challenge self-deprecating tendencies!

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Are you holding yourself back from greatness? Chiron retrograde wants you to recognize your tendency to self-sabotage!

Libra (Sept.23-Oct. 23). When did you get so touchy? Chiron’s retrograde invites you to take an inventory of emotional moments since the end of June.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Feeling walked over? You’ve been giving much more than you’re getting lately.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Mistakes on display? It feels that way, but actually you’re your own worst critic!

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Avoiding from the spotlight? Consider why that is. You haven’t always been camera shy.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Feeling unqualified to be another’s support system? Chiron retrograde will have you reexamining that belief.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Saying too much or too little? Quit policing your voice!

STREAMING

Coach Beard (Brendan Hunt) and Ted Lasso (Jason Sudeikis) reunite in Season 4 of the Apple TV series, which introduces Alice Chilton (Tanya Reynolds). PROVIDED BY COLIN HUTTON/APPLE TV

On the pitch and off, ‘Lasso’ roped Season 4

Erin Jensen USA TODAY

In the throes of a global pandemic, Apple TV’s “Ted Lasso” premiered, buoying viewers by leaning into virtues not often center stage in productions – such sentiments as hope, forgiveness, honesty and the bold choice to believe that one’s circumstances can change. But after three seasons and 34 episodes, the soccer dramedy left the field.

In the Season 3 finale May 31, 2023, Coach Lasso (Jason Sudeikis) packed his visor and whistle and headed back to Kansas City to be with his son Henry after transforming the AFC Richmond team, owned by Rebecca Welton (Hannah Waddingham). Lasso’s companion for Biscuits With the Boss sold a portion of the team to the public and heard a pitch from her best friend, PR extraordinaire Keeley Jones (Juno Temple), about a women’s team.

Leslie Higgins (Jeremy Swift), Rebecca Welton (Hannah Waddingham) and Keeley Jones (Juno Temple) pay a visit to Ted Lasso (Sudeikis) in the Season 4 premiere. PROVIDED BY MICHAEL BECKER/APPLE TV

“I certainly thought it could well be done,” Brendan Hunt, series cocreator who also plays offbeat Coach Beard in the series, tells USA TODAY. “Because by the time we finished Season 3, we were very tired. And if I was tired, then I knew Jason had to be even more so because the show takes even more [of] a toll on him than it does the rest of us.”

Sudeikis, Hunt and Brett Goldstein, who plays coach Roy Kent, are what sports fans call utility players, doing triple duty as writers, producers and stars.

“Jason’s also got a lot of emotional places he’s got to go to on camera for this as well,” says Hunt, 54. “So just the trappings of the structure of what it is and what our jobs are inherently just takes a lot out of you.”

But if Lasso has taught us anything, it’s the power of hope. In February 2024, writers assembled at the Ojai Valley Inn, a resort 82 miles northwest of Los Angeles that once counted Clark Gable and Judy Garland among its guests.

“I was glad that we were doing that first because we also shouldn’t just blindly jump into another season,” Hunt says. “We should make sure it’s a good idea.”

They met to see how easy brainstorming ideas for Season 4 would be.

“Jason was pretty sure at that point he wanted to do a women’s team, but even then it was like: ‘Should it be the

See TED LASSO, Page 2D

FASHION NEWS & VIEWS

Goddess Zendaya reinvents red carpet

Morgan Evans
USA TODAY

No one does a press tour quite like Zendaya. In one of her busiest years, with back-to-back releases, the star has shown the world how she makes the red carpet her runway.

With the styling help of her longtime friend and image architect, Law Roach, Zendaya kicked off her year with her movie “The Drama,” creating a string of edgy “something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue” looks to match its (disastrous) wedding theme. But her press tours for “The Odyssey” and “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” have been where she has really shined, taking the concept of method dressing to the next level.

You’d think Zendaya fatigue might have set in, but each look is new, on theme and often unexpected. And while it can seem, from a simplistic view, like an actress playing dress-up, what you’re really witnessing is a connoisseur of fashion exploring the medium as a true art form. It’s intentional storytelling and a combination of craft and culture uniquely derived from

Zendaya at Trocadero Square in Paris on July 7. PIERRE MOUTON/ GETTY IMAGES FOR UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Zendaya’s and Roach’s unparalleled creative connection.

“Part of doing the press stuff and trying to make the clothes intentional is not just trying to pay homage but giving little trails of ideas and thoughts,” Zendaya said in an interview with De Estreno. “And maybe it’s true! Maybe it’s confusing! That’s the fun of it!”

We’re revisiting all the looks that captivated us, with a breakdown of why Zendaya’s 2026 summer press tour will stand the test of time.

Custom and fresh-off-the-runway looks

If there is anyone who has mastered the art of the runway pull, it’s Zendaya and Roach. To kick off “The Odyssey” press tour July 5, in London, the actress donned a custom Jacquemus ivory column dress with an attached head scarf inspired by the silhouettes from the designer’s spring/summer 2027 collection. Channeling the spirit of ancient Greece, the star accessorized the look with something old: a pair of 1st millennium gold ancient discs, owned by Barron London, mounted into earrings with 18-carat gold and diamonds by designer Glenn Spiro.

The next day, for “The Odyssey”

See ZENDAYA, Page 2D

MOVIES

Adulting can be hard, even for a guy like Spider-Man

Brian Truit USA TODAY

Tom Holland's superhero in "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" is great at his job, but his personal life is at a low point. He grows distant from his friends and watches them live their lives over social media. He's also going through some things physically and is feeling quite out of place.

It sounds a lot like what many people experience after their teen years. (Outside of battling the Hulk, of course.) And that's why director Destin Daniel Cretton ("Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings") feels his latest Marvel movie (in theaters now) taps into something quite universal: how to deal with major life transitions.

"To me, it was always Peter Parker's ultimate coming-of-age story," Cretton says of Spidey's unmasked alter ego. "It's that time when real life just smacks you in the face and what you thought was so easy to understand, the difference between right and wrong and good and bad, suddenly becomes very gray. You feel real loss for the first time, real tragedy for the first time, real loneliness for the first time.

"It is about adulthood. The answer to how you survive these major transitions is the other theme of the movie: learning to lean on the people around you who help keep your feet on the ground."

The previous three "Spider-Man" movies followed Peter's high school years growing up in Queens with girlfriend MJ (Zendaya) and best pal Ned Leeds (Jacob Batalon) while also fighting supervillains solo and beside the Avengers. The ending of 2021's "Spider-Man: No Way Home," however, left our hero in quite a pickle: A magic spell to solve a multiverse crisis made the world forget Peter, including MJ and Ned.

Cretton points to a few times in his own life after leaving college – "going through a breakup, not having a job, feeling like I'm just floating in the wind" – where "the brain can really trick you into thinking that you're the only person on the planet who's going through these types of emotions," he says. The fact that "literally nobody knows who he is was to me a relatable place to start this character."

An early scene in "Brand New Day" shows Peter's personal plight: He gets a key to the city as Spider-Man for all his everyday derring-do, and he's seen twirling the key, alone, while doing laundry. When MJ and Ned move back to New York City as roommates after graduating from MIT, Peter quietly crashes their housewarming party. He sees Ned is still obsessed with Spider-Man, hatching a Spidey tracker app, and that MJ has moved on with a new boyfriend.

Anyone who has ever run into a person they knew in high school who didn't remember them probably relates to Peter's pain. "There's no worse feeling than feeling unseen," Cretton says. "Everybody feels like that, even just throughout the day – even somebody who clearly knows who you are, it's still easy to feel unseen by people."

Complicating matters even further for Peter, in addition to a mysterious new supervillain who confounds him, is the fact that his body's changing. The arachnid DNA is starting to evolve and overtake his human side, presenting as an overloading of his super-senses, blackouts that result in him waking up in weird web structures, and a general feeling of being out of sorts with his abilities.

Cretton used elements of body horror to viscerally depict Peter's troubles and leaned on his own influences. "'Teen Wolf' was like my jam when I was young," he says. "There's no better way to tell the story of growing up than with physical changes that you can't control, that make you feel like a monster.

"In many ways, Peter is fighting change in this movie. He is trying to control his life, you know? And part of his journey is learning to accept that change is inevitable."

There's a strong emphasis overall on mental health in "Brand New Day," which is reflective of a new theme in Marvel movies: Last year's "Thunderbolts" also tackled loneliness, as well as trauma and depression.

"I love watching these big, spectacular movies when there's something about it that really relates to me and my personal experience," Cretton says. "I don't know if that's going to become a fad, but I do hope that continues."

Spider-Man (Tom Holland) finds his super-senses going into painful overdrive in "Spider-Man: Brand New Day." PROVIDED BY SONY PICTURES

Ted Lasso

Continued from Page 1D

Richmond women's team? Should it be a team in America?' " Hunt says. "We talked all those things through, and eventually we were like: 'No, no, the show's in Richmond, and we put the Richmond women's team there in that final montage. Let's follow that.' We talked about a lot of big-picture things and came away with the feeling: 'Yeah, all right. There's enough here. The soil remains fertile, so let's have a go.' "

What is 'Ted Lasso' Season 4 about?

Season 4, set to premiere Aug. 5, picks up three years after leaving Richmond. Ted is now working as an assistant manager at a local grocery store in Kansas City. Though he might not be entirely devoted to his new career, it allows him to be a present dad for son Henry (recast as Grant Feely for Season 4). A visit from Rebecca, Keely and Leslie Higgins (Jeremy Swift) challenges that line of thinking.

"When this offer comes in, all of a sudden, of coaching the women's team, it starts to shine some light on the fact that if he's not being the best Ted he can be, then is he inherently not being the best dad he can be?" Hunt says. "Does part of being a good dad mean showing your child you being the best version of yourself, and you leaning into your mission, not just trying to make time for other people in your life, no matter how beloved or legitimate those people may be?"

So Ted goes abroad to coach AFC Richmond's women's team, reuniting viewers with Kent, Coach Beard, pub owner Mae Green (Annette Badland) and more.

Sudeikis 'tries to make the show better until the last possible second'

In June, Waddingham issued a metaphorical penalty card to outlets reporting on a feud with Sudeikis, after speaking to Variety about his propensity for rewrites. On Instagram, Waddingham called the notion as "ridiculous," according to Entertainment Tonight. "Is it a quiet news day or something?! Get a life!!!"

Sudeikis "will be on that laptop trying to make the show better until the last possible second," Hunt says. "And I think that has been one of the things that's made the show the best show it can be. And that speaks to his 'SNL' background as much as anything, and sketch background."

Hunt says Sudeikis, who joined "SNL" as a writer in 2003 and became a cast member before leaving in 2013, believes " 'OK, well we haven't shot it yet, so we can still make it better.' And we've been very fortunate to have a cast who are very agile at rolling with what we throw them at the last minute."

Ted and Coach Beard appear at World Cup Final

Hunt and Sudeikis appeared in character during the FIFA World Cup Final on July 19 to introduce Justin Bieber for the halftime show.

During the surprise cameo, Sudeikis told Bieber: "Go out there. Don't be nervous. Nobody's watching. Make us proud." Meanwhile, Hunt held up a modified substitution board with Bieber's initials and a yellow and blue "BELIEBE" sign, a parody of the "BELIEVE" reminder that hung in the Richmond locker room.

And that cameo, Hunt says, was thanks to Coldplay's frontman.

"Chris Martin apparently called Jason back in February and said, 'Hey, we're doing this halftime show for the World Cup Final, and we think Ted Lasso should be in it,'" Hunt says. "And because Jason is the best friend in the world, he said, 'Wow, well, if Ted Lasso's going to be in it, Coach Beard should probably be in it too, huh?'

"Then suddenly I was roped in, then had to sit on it as a secret for five months," Hunt adds with a laugh.

At the rehearsal, Hunt calls it "absolutely surreal" to meet Bieber and fellow performers, Shakira and Gustavo Dudamel of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

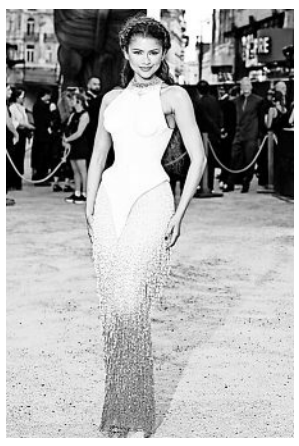
"You try not to think about what it was while it was happening, and now it's just going to be this crazy-ass thing to look back on for the rest of time."

Zendaya

Continued from Page 1D

premiere in London, Zendaya wore a structural Schiaparelli gown plucked straight from Daniel Roseberry's fall/winter 2026 collection. The actress literally lit up the red carpet in the dress, which featured a sculpted glazed porcelain-effect white breastplate with a signature Schiaparelli lace-up back and an LED-illuminated skirt made of cascading beaded fringe in a white and silver ombré. She topped off her Greek-sculpture-inspired look with an 88-carat Chopard collar necklace and an ethereal halo braid hairstyle.

The look redefined "new": Not only was Zendaya the first to wear one of the illuminated Schiaparelli sheaths on the red carpet, she did so just hours after the look went down the runway at Paris Couture Week. In an interview backstage at the Schiaparelli show, Roach explained he was on a mission to pick up the dress and bring it to London in time for Zendaya to wear it to the premiere that same evening.



Zendaya attends "The Odyssey" world premiere in London on July 6 in London. GARETH CATTERMOLE/ GETTY IMAGES

Zendaya sports a Black Widow-inspired look at the LA premiere of "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" on July 27. AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Inspired pulls from the archives

Zendaya's press tours balance those fresh looks with a deep dive into the archives to revive vintage pieces, using Roach's deep knowledge of historical fashion.

One example is her Audrey Hepburn-esque dress for the Paris photo-call for "The Odyssey," designed by Alexander McQueen for Givenchy's haute couture spring/summer 1997 collection. It featured a high neck with exaggerated pagoda sleeves and padded shoulders.

Zendaya and Roach also were able to source the ornate gold face mask designed by Philip Treacy that originally was worn with the dress on the runway.

Later, for "Odyssey" press in New York, Zendaya sported a white, plunge-neck Alberta Ferretti mini dress from the spring/summer 2008 collection, featuring airy pleats and embellished with silver fringe. She accessorized the look with knee-high Webster caged sandals for a full gladiator-inspired look.

For "Spider Man," in which Zendaya stars with husband Tom Holland, she and Roach sourced multiple cobweb-clad dresses. The actress channeled her inner "Kiss of the Spider Woman" in everything from a form-fitting, chiffon-webbed gown from Versace's spring/summer 2016 collection to a black, cap-sleeved 1940s cocktail dress embellished with a glittering silver spider web – a true vintage treasure.

But two standout archival looks had the internet and fans everywhere abuzz. For the film's Rome premiere June 23, Zendaya was on theme in a beaded spider-web-embellished gown from Armani's spring/summer 1990 collection, accessorized with dangling Tiffany & Co. diamonds. A few days later, Holland and Zendaya attended the film's London photo-call in complementary dark looks. Zendaya wowed in a celestial-patterned navy and black slip-style dress from John Galliano's spring/summer 1997 collection, which featured a dazzling beaded spider web design.

Surprise high-low moments

In June, the star turned heads when she walked the carpet in Paris in an oversized black Spider-Man graphic tee sans pants. Roach later revealed on Instagram that the men's 2XL tee was purchased on eBay for $34.99, showing the world that fashion doesn't always have to be expensive. Adding her favorite white Louboutin heels, Zendaya created a high-low look that will go down in history.

The two-dress 'rule'

In the words of Roach, "there's always two dresses." At the "Odyssey" premiere in London, the star swapped her illuminated Schiaparelli creation for a draped Valentino gown inspired by the Garden of Eden, featuring a leafy bustier and straps.

A week later, before the New York premiere, the star was snapped leaving her hotel in a flowing nude gown from Pamela Rolland, featuring a sweetheart neckline and draped bodice with breezy chiffon layers. Yet for the red carpet, she turned to provocative Canadian brand Matières Fécales' heavenly "Ange" dress.

The ruched, feather-trimmed gown featured a plunge strapless sweetheart neckline with a thigh-high slit and a set of feathered wings seamlessly blending with the dress's billowing train.

The actress topped off the overall look with a whimsical undone braid and a barely-there Prada Beauty makeup look by Ernesto Casillas that revived the "no mascara" conversation online.

The look was a curated goddess moment, from the drop diamond Chopard earrings to the heelless shoes, which were a collaboration from Matières Fécales and Christian Louboutin. They featured a traditional pointed-toe front with a sculptural wedge back creating the illusion of an invisible heel.

Stories told through color

Whites and neutrals reigned supreme in the star's "Odyssey" press tour wardrobe. The star channeled her inner Greek goddess in a series of whimsical looks that were worthy of Athena (not to mention a nod to the star's bridal era). It wasn't just the Scharparelli, Jacquemus and Matières Fécales dresses but also a romantic lace Louis Vuitton ensemble in Paris. At the end of the tour, Zendaya added splashes of gold to the mix, shining in looks including a 2013 Zuhair Murad skirt suit.

For "Spider-Man," the actress kept to a black, red and/or blue color scheme, mirroring the superhero's webbed costume, coordinating with Holland.

When she wasn't sporting spider web motifs, she evoked a vampy aesthetic in dark looks, as in her Morticia Addams-inspired Ashi Studio black gown equipped with black lace applique and floor-length-fringe sleeves. And who can forget her black leather Louis Vuitton outfit, which featured a cropped vest top with a matching, form-fitting maxi skirt?

In Berlin, the star sported a vintage varsity in a red jersey shirt tucked into a plaid pencil skirt from Coach's fall/winter 2026 ready-to-wear collection. A day later in Rome, Zendaya sparkled in a Versace red-and-blue, color-block chainmail top and skirt set from the brand's fall/winter 1997 collection.

But the star saved her best for last. At the Los Angeles premiere July 27, Zendaya once again turned to Ashi Studio for a dramatic Black Widow-inspired look.

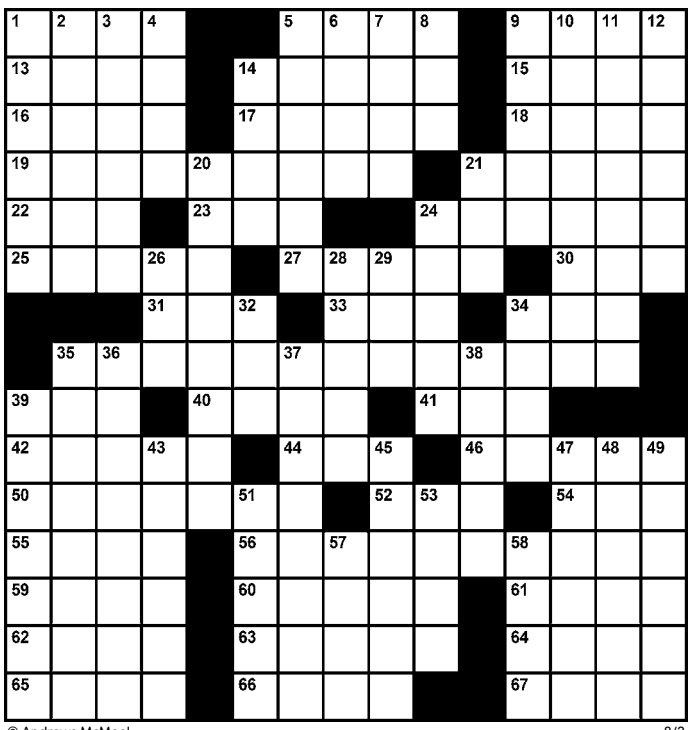
The star wowed in a black satin gown featuring a structural plunge corset with a ruched asymmetrical skirt and flowing train. The star accented the couture look with art deco Boucheron earrings and custom Louboutin pumps embellished with a crystal spider on the toe and another on the back of the heel.

Zendaya and Roach's fashions are the stuff of legends. And just like "The Odyssey," her most recent press tours will be forever epic.

USA TODAY CROSSWORD

EDITED Amanda Rafkin
BY CJ Tan

KINETIC SAND



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ACROSS
1 "Billions" actor Giamatti
5 Big brass instrument
9 School fundraising grps.
13 Debussy's "Clair de ___"
14 Bicep exercises
15 Great Lake closest to the equator
16 ___ Minor (constellation)
17 Extremely kind person
18 "Is This Thing On?" actress Laura
19 "Looks practically untouched now!"
21 Parts of rotary phones
22 Offline, for short
23 "Barbie" actress Issa
24 Sydneysider or Melburnian
25 Zenith's opposite
27 Romantic thing to "drop"
30 College, to Brits
31 Down in the dumps
33 Fury
34 Metal deposit
35 "Yes," "No" or "Maybe," e.g.
39 "No more seats" letters
40 ___-slapper (funny joke)
41 "___ make myself clear?"
42 Gracefully flexible
44 Fourths of a gallon (Abbr.)
46 Takes five
50 "That's a bad hiding spot!"
52 Night before
54 Dance like Juanita Pitts
55 Italian city where tourists pose like they're pushing a tower
56 ". . . ish"
59 Symbol on Vietnam's flag
60 Opera solos
61 Follow, like advice
62 Ballpark officials
63 Pasta often served "alla vodka"
64 Queen of the Olympians
65 Nickname for Jose
66 Mid-March, for Caesar
67 Teensy

DOWN
1 Software add-on
2 ___ borealis
3 Like goods still on the shelf
4 Main role
5 ___ vision (state of intense fixation)
6 It's hard to resist
7 Huffed and puffed
8 Communication system in "CODA"
9 Manis' counterparts
10 Loot in a chest
11 Large commercial plane
12 Martial arts teacher
14 House, in Spanish
20 Button that might be used for scrolling
21 "Sub" alternative, when watching anime
24 Formally revise
26 ___-de-France (where Paris is)
28 Bathroom fixture
29 Pop singer Rita
32 Triumphed
34 Kid's boo-boo
35 "Am I the only one who feels that way?"
36 Program for reminders or apologies
37 Needed
38 Sensitive spots
39 Accidentally blurts out a secret, say
43 Long black vehicle
45 Four-door cars
47 Drive way?
48 Spuds
49 Outing for self-restoration
51 Zebra giraffe, by another name
53 Bouquet holder
57 On cloud ___
58 "Whoa, hey there!"

Friday's Answer

7/31

Answers: Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.

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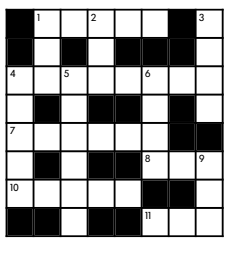
TXTPERT



8/3

Across
1. 55266
4. 22769273
7. 782253
8. 327
10. 94353
11. 246

Down
1. 532
2. 296
3. 4433
4. 26759
5. 732737
6. 2533
9. 786

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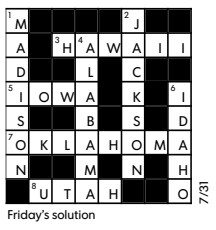
Today's theme
Agriculture

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues. For example: 2 could be A, B or C ... and 5678 could be LOST



7/31

Friday's solution

Numbers

More puzzles: **PLAY.usatoday.com**
Want solutions? **answers.usatoday.com**
Feedback: **feedback@usatoday.com**

SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

				1	8		2	3
	3	8		6		5		1
2			7	3				6
	6			9	3	2		7
3				2				4
5		7	6	8			1	
6				4	9			2
1		3		5		4	9	
4	9		8	7				

8/3

DIFFICULTY RATING ★☆☆☆☆

SUDOKU FUSION ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

2	5				6
	3	6	5		2
		2	6	3	
	1	3	2		
4		5	1	6	
3				2	5

DIFFICULTY RATING ★☆☆☆☆

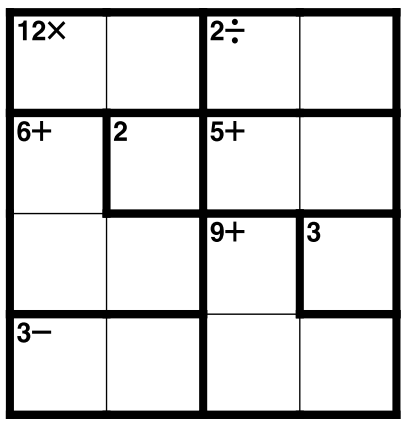
Friday's Answers

7	5	9	6	2	8	4	3	1
2	4	6	3	5	1	8	9	7
3	1	8	4	7	9	6	2	5
4	6	1	2	8	5	9	7	3
9	2	3	7	4	6	1	5	8
8	7	5	9	1	3	2	6	4
1	3	4	5	6	2	7	8	9
6	9	7	8	3	4	5	1	2
5	8	2	1	9	7	3	4	6

4	5	6	3	2	1
3	2	1	4	5	6
6	4	3	2	1	5
2	1	5	6	3	4
1	6	2	5	4	3
5	3	4	1	6	2

7/31

KENKEN



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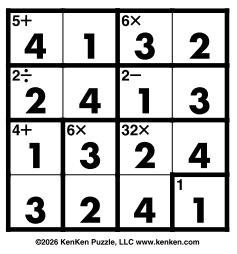
1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 without repeating.

2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.

3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

FRIDAY'S SOLUTION



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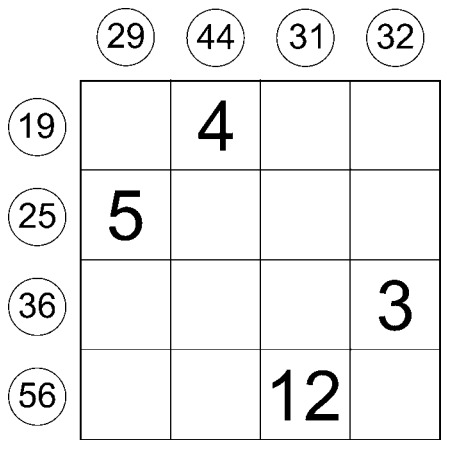
KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo Difficulty: **EXPERT**



Solution to Friday's puzzle

14	7	1	16
10	9	6	8
11	12	5	4
13	3	15	2

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

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Words

WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 8/3

Find and Circle:
Four royal titles ☑☐☐☐
Four seven-letter colors ☐☐☐☐
Three mollusks ☐☐☐
Three aquatic mammals ☐☐☐
Five-letter bird ☐

Friday's answer: MANDOLIN GUITAR SITAR VIOLA CELLO BANJO HARP LUTE LYRE / PERIOD COLON COMMA / GRAND CENTRAL / FRASIER / NIELSEN

K	F	L	S	D	R	C	E	O	N	N	E
M	I	U	R	C	U	L	C	T	E	O	C
A	N	N	C	S	A	K	M	T	E	S	N
L	C	H	G	H	N	R	E	E	U	M	I
C	H	J	W	T	S	A	L	R	Q	I	R
O	Y	S	T	E	R	I	I	E	M	R	P
M	A	G	E	N	T	A	A	L	T	C	Z
H	Z	H	D	O	L	P	H	I	N	C	B

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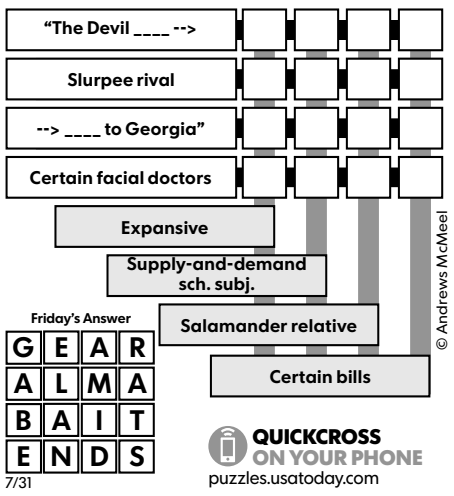
QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes 8/3



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Friday's Answer

G	E	A	R
A	L	M	A
B	A	I	T
E	N	D	S

7/31

QUICKCROSS ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 8/3

1. **NEW** _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____ **RANGOON**

Clues:
1. Original notion
2. Auto show prototype
3. Vehicle theft deterrent
4. Keypad entry sequence
5. Critical medical call
6. Chesapeake Bay crustacean
7. Chinese restaurant starter

Friday's Answer

DON'T	SPEAK	FRENCH	VANILLA
SPEAK	FRENCH	VANILLA	SKY
FRENCH	VANILLA	SKY	BLUE
VANILLA	SKY	BLUE	CRAB
SKY	BLUE	CRAB	RANGOON
BLUE	CRAB	RANGOON	
CRAB	RANGOON		

PLAY ONLINE PUZZLES.USATODAY.COM

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DON'T QUOTE ME®

©WIGGLES 3D GAMES

Comedian Judy Tenuta shares this thought.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
FRIENDS GUTS HAVE JUST YOU

"_____ ARE ___ ENEMIES THAT DON'T ___ ENOUGH ___ TO KILL ___." 8/3

Friday's Answer: "A bad review is like baking a cake with all the best ingredients and having someone sit on it." - Danielle Steel

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 having a quibble (9)	_____
2 lightning follower (11)	_____
3 Taylor and Banks (10)	_____
4 opening eggshells, perhaps (8)	_____
5 set up (9)	_____
6 Stonehenge and Sphinx (9)	_____
7 classic French pastries (10)	_____

CKER	BI	THUN	ABE	CLAP
DER	THS	MON	NTS	CON
ISSA	CRO	ING	CRAC	FIG
NTS	URE	UME	KING	ELIZ

Friday's Answers: 1. MOORED 2. CLIMBED 3. GENEROSITY 4. JOYLESS 5. MAGPIES 6. MELBOURNE 7. ZLOTY 8/1

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JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

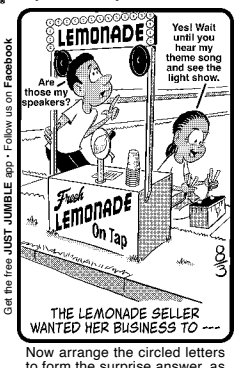
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

GTANR

TNSRO

SISKDE

RSEUQA


LEMONADE
Are those my speakers?
Yes! Wait until you hear my theme song and see the light show.
Fresh LEMONADE On Tap
THE LEMONADE SELLER WANTED HER BUSINESS TO ---

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print your answer here: _____

(Answers tomorrow)

FRIDAY'S ANSWERS
DITTO JOINT MISERY WIRING
New baseball bats weren't in the budget, but the team's manager said he'd — TRY TO SWING IT

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BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Flavoring plant
5 Shipboard poles
10 Prod
14 Graven image
15 Indigenous Alaskan
16 Actress — Falco
17 Missile housing
18 Singer — Ross
19 Hoop
20 Cooked in water
22 Taking it easy
24 Sword
26 "Begone!"
27 Cables for securing a boat
31 Smell
34 Branch
35 Harvest goddess
37 Compare
39 Told a tale
41 Coup —
43 Grotto
44 Licit
46 Private teacher
48 Place
49 Pasternak character
50 Spoofs
52 Tangle
55 Disney's "Finding —"
56 Coagulated
59 "— 13"
63 Poi source
64 Fear
66 Damage
67 Cogito — sum
68 Poetic Muse
69 Sicilian volcano
70 Judge
71 Pertain
72 Doe

DOWN
1 Sibilant sound
2 Redact
3 Function
4 Hot-air furnace component
5 Drove crazy
6 — Baba
7 Burn
8 Ditties
9 Hidden supply
10 Happening at regular intervals
11 Norse god
12 Monarch
13 Brain-wave reading
21 Monumental
23 Implement
25 Long-legged bird
27 Public walk
28 Bay window
29 Last letter
30 Assemble (2 wds.)
32 Giraffe relative
33 Variety show
36 Beelzebub
38 Earns as profit
40 Photo lab, once
42 Bullfighter
45 Nation
47 Play boisterously
51 Condemned
53 More senior
54 — Haute
56 Concern
57 Compulsion
58 Unable to hear
60 Tardy
61 Wrinkle
62 — Khayyam
63 Danson of "Cheers"
65 Snacked

FRIDAY'S SOLUTION

L	A	M	P	■	V	E	T	S	■	■	■	C	B	S
I	S	E	E	■	E	V	O	K	E	■	F	A	I	L
E	A	S	T	■	N	A	M	E	D	■	A	S	T	I
S	P	A	R	S	E	■	B	E	D	E	C	K	E	D
■	■	■	O	A	T	S	■	T	I	N	T	■	■	■
T	R	I	L	L	I	O	N	■	E	D	U	C	E	■
R	O	N	■	T	A	L	E	S	■	S	A	L	V	O
A	P	A	R	■	N	A	V	E	L	■	L	E	A	D
P	E	N	A	L	■	R	E	G	A	L	■	A	D	O
■	S	E	V	E	R	■	R	U	N	A	F	T	E	R
■	■	■	I	S	I	S	■	E	D	N	A	■	■	■
A	C	C	O	S	T	E	D	■	M	E	L	T	E	D
P	O	O	L	■	E	R	I	C	A	■	T	I	D	E
S	A	R	I	■	S	I	N	U	S	■	E	R	I	S
O	L	D	■	■	N	O	E	S	■	R	E	E	K	■

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MUSIC NEWS & VIEWS

Mellencamp's rebel spirit fuels 'Hits' parade

Melissa Ruggieri
USA TODAY

John Mellencamp, on opening night in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is rolling out his greatest hits for a summer tour in July and August. SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES FOR LIVE NATION

BRISTOW, VA – From the moment he strolled on stage, cigarette dangling from one hand, guitar slung over his shoulder, John Mellencamp oozed authenticity.

He's midway through an amphitheater run dubbed Dancing Words Tour – The Greatest Hits, a notable distinction considering many of the songs during his two-set, 23-song concert hadn't been performed live much in years.

But tucked amid timeless muscular gems including "I Need a Lover," "Cherry Bomb" and "Rain on the Scarecrow" were a handful of album tracks that might not have lighted the charts but were plucked from the catalog as rare treats for fans.

One of them, 2014's "Lawless Times," opened the 2½-hour show (including a 15-minute intermission) and its Bourbon Street-swing coupled with Mellencamp's dry delivery set the tone for a show he dedicated to "all you misfits, all you mavericks, all you nonconformists."

It was a fitting greeting, because Mellencamp, 74, always has been candid, from the bratty Johnny Cougar days in the late-'70s and early '80s to the cranky elder statesman who never met an opinion he didn't want to share.

At the July 29 stop at Jiffy Lube Live in northern Virginia, Mellencamp and his tremendous eight-piece band – including multifaceted standout Crystal Taliefero, who returned home to the guy who discovered her after decades playing with Billy Joel – romped and rolled through familiar terrain that never hurt so good.

Here are some highlights.

Mellencamp's songs have always imparted wisdom

So many of Mellencamp's songs shuddered with sagacity, from rootsy strummers such as "Small Town" and "Key West Intermezzo (I Saw You First)" – recast as an acoustic ballad on this night – or barn burners "R.O.C.K. in the USA" and "Paper in Fire."

Mellencamp's grizzled visage is the perfect match to his husky voice that imbues songs such as "Lonely Ol' Night" and "Ain't Even Done With the Night" with lived-in wisdom that is even more palpable onstage.

In his white T-shirt and black pants (changing to a black T-shirt for the second act), hair brushed back on the sides except for a stubborn forelock, Mellencamp frequently looked into the crowd to soak in the appreciation being thrust toward him.

His playfulness was on prime display during his little ditty "Jack & Diane," which he performed solo with only his acoustic guitar for backup. Teasing the eager-to-sing-along crowd for jumping to the song's chorus too early, Mellencamp exposed his impish charm as he conducted the chorus of voices.

He will always be a Gulf of Mexico guy

A primarily hits-filled concert always evokes songs that may have been forgotten, the "Oh right, he sings *that*, too" phenomenon.

But with Mellencamp, it's more of a memory jogger how many treasured lyrics stem from his classics: "He hit the highway" ("I Need a Lover"); "Life goes on, long after the thrill of living is gone" ("Jack & Diane"); "I fight authority, authority always wins" ("Authority Song"); and "Ain't that America, for you and me?" ("Pink Houses").

The last of that group, his 1983 commentary on race and class disparity, often misinterpreted as patriotic pabulum, has included commentary from Mellencamp during the lyric about vacationing "down at the Gulf of Mexico."

Mellencamp's remarks at other recent shows about the Trump administration's renaming the body of water the Gulf of America have included some form of "that was stupid." (The White House responded, calling him an "out-of-touch, woke Hollywood" celebrity.)

At the Virginia show, Mellencamp was more muted, stopping the song to ask, "Didn't we change the name of that?" Boos from the crowd filled the air as he continued, "The Gulf ... of America. I think the Gulf of Mexico is better." The boos changed to cheers.

Mellencamp's rebellious spirit drives him

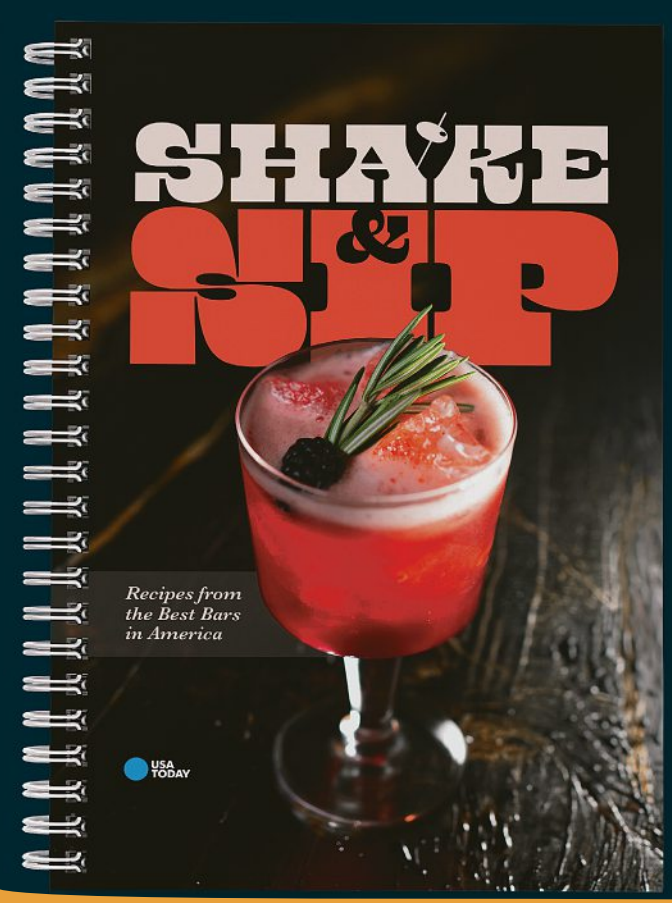
Along with his status as blue-collar rocker, Mellencamp also is a respected artist.

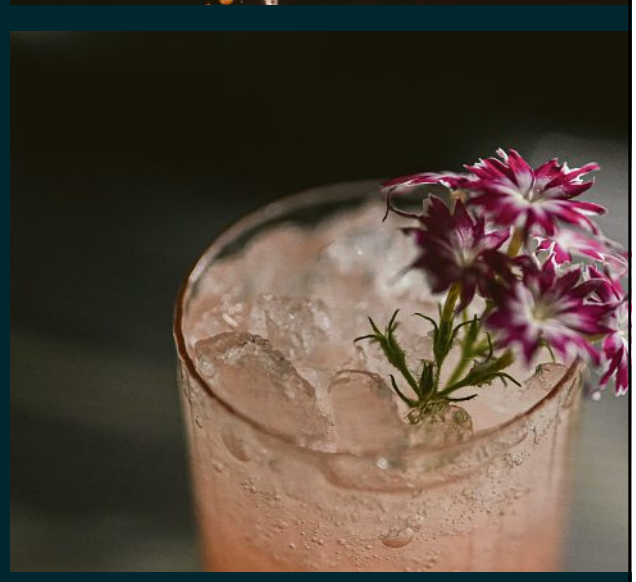
Though the visuals for the show – a vintage movie theater, a burning field – lent a polished edge, it was a delight to see many of Mellencamp's self-portraits scroll behind the stage during the sardonic "Pop Singer."

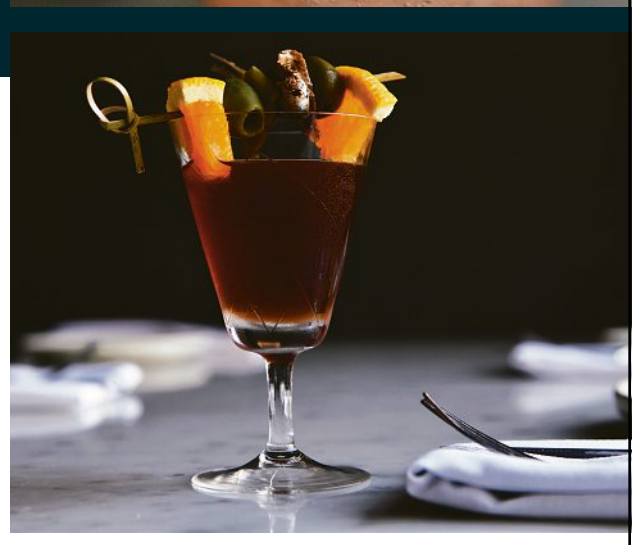
Interspersed with Mellencamp's idiosyncratic views of himself were old press shots of the singer, many without a shirt or showcasing pouts and flexed biceps, that fit the song's wry message.

But the ensuing offerings – "Authority Song" and "Crumblin' Down" – were perfectly placed reminders of the rebellious spirit that has powered his career and how the heart of Mellencamp's music has always been his soul.

Legendary cocktails.
SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE.







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NATION&WORLD EXTRA

EUROPEAN WILDFIRES

Firefighters in France were battling a so-called "zombie fire," a wildfire that can smolder underground for extended periods, amid drought conditions, a heatwave alert, and water shortages across much of the country. FLORION GOGA/REUTERS

Firefighters strain under huge blazes

Torrid summer raises questions about fire services

Juliette Jabkhiro, Elizabeth Pineau and Corina Pons REUTERS

BORDEAUX, France – Massive wildfires burning near the French city of Bordeaux and across the border in Spain are placing a huge strain on the firefighters battling on the front line, raising questions about the way fire services are organized. ● More than three-quarters of firefighters in France are volunteers who take time off from a day job to respond to emergencies, while Spain is reliant on thousands of "bomberos forestales" (forest firefighters), many of whom are hired on temporary seasonal contracts by regional authorities. ● Pierre-Hadrien Lusignan is a volunteer in France's western Gironde region who has been working since last week on the fire that threatened Bordeaux, a metropolitan area that is home to around 850,000 people.

"The first 24 to 48 hours were tough. At the very beginning, the intensity of the fire made it difficult to manage," said Lusignan, who has been a volunteer for eight years.

"The wind was shifting, and the fire was spreading unpredictably. Then reinforcements arrived – firefighters from all over France and Europe."

Four firefighters have died in France since the start of the summer, and unions are raising the alarm about staffing shortages and crew exhaustion, with a record 286,000 acres having burned in the country since the beginning of the year.

Two of those who lost their lives in July were based in Saint-Médard-en-Jalles, where Lusignan works as the director of a community cultural center.

"The deaths of these two colleagues added a

See WILDFIRES, Page 4NN

Firefighters embrace after bulldozing work in Valdemaqueda to battle wildfires affecting parts of Spain on July 29. VIOLETA SANTOS MOURA/REUTERS

A firefighter works to extinguish an advancing wildfire near Formariz in Zamora province, Spain, on July 29. UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

U.S. testing new 'pilot zones' in Lebanon

Israel still pushes for Hezbollah disarmament

Maya Gebeily, Emilie Madi and Mahmoud Hasano REUTERS

ZAWTAR AL-GHARBIYEH, Lebanon – A plan for Israel to withdraw gradually from occupied areas of southern Lebanon in exchange for the disarmament of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia is off to a painfully slow start.

To the United States, the "pilot zone program" is the centerpiece of a June 26 framework deal intended to end the war between Israel and Hezbollah, and establish peaceful ties between Israel and Lebanon.

But Hezbollah still refuses to give up its weapons. And on the ground, the rollout of the first zone in the south Lebanese village of Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh last week offered a glimpse of a strained and complex process.

A senior Lebanese military official, who requested anonymity in order to speak freely, said it had taken weeks of U.S.-brokered negotiations with Israel and days of military operations to establish the first zone in a single village. The agreement links Israel's progressive withdrawal to the "verified

See LEBANON, Page 4NN

Supporters and protesters of the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran confront each other during an Aug. 2 anti-war rally at Copley Square in Boston. JMKOSEPH PREZIOSO/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Trump says U.S. to hold off on fresh Iran attack

President again presses for a quick resolution

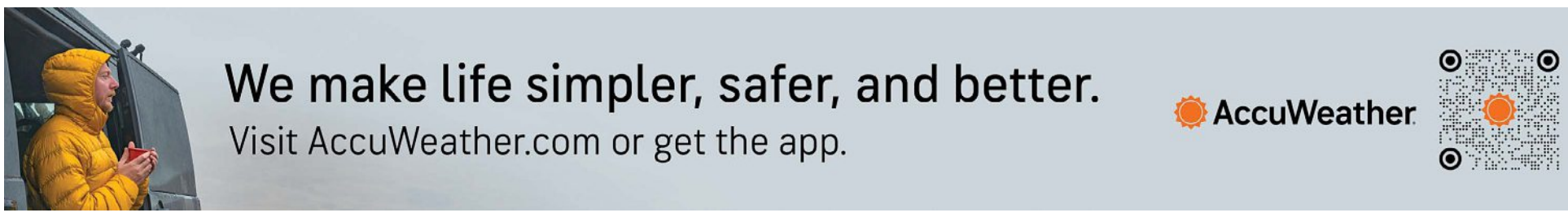
Yasmine Ghania and Menna AlaaElDin REUTERS

CAIRO – President Donald Trump said talks with Iran will happen on Aug. 3 but declined to set a deadline for an agreement after earlier saying he had called off an imminent attack in hopes of quickly reaching a deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and resolve the impasse over Tehran's nuclear capabilities.

Trump had said late on Aug. 1 on his Truth Social platform that Iran and other Middle Eastern countries had asked for time to complete a deal that would lead to "the Immediate, Complete and Total" reopening of the strait and "an end to Iran's nuclear threat."

He did not name the countries in the post, which followed a call with

See IRAN, Page 4NN

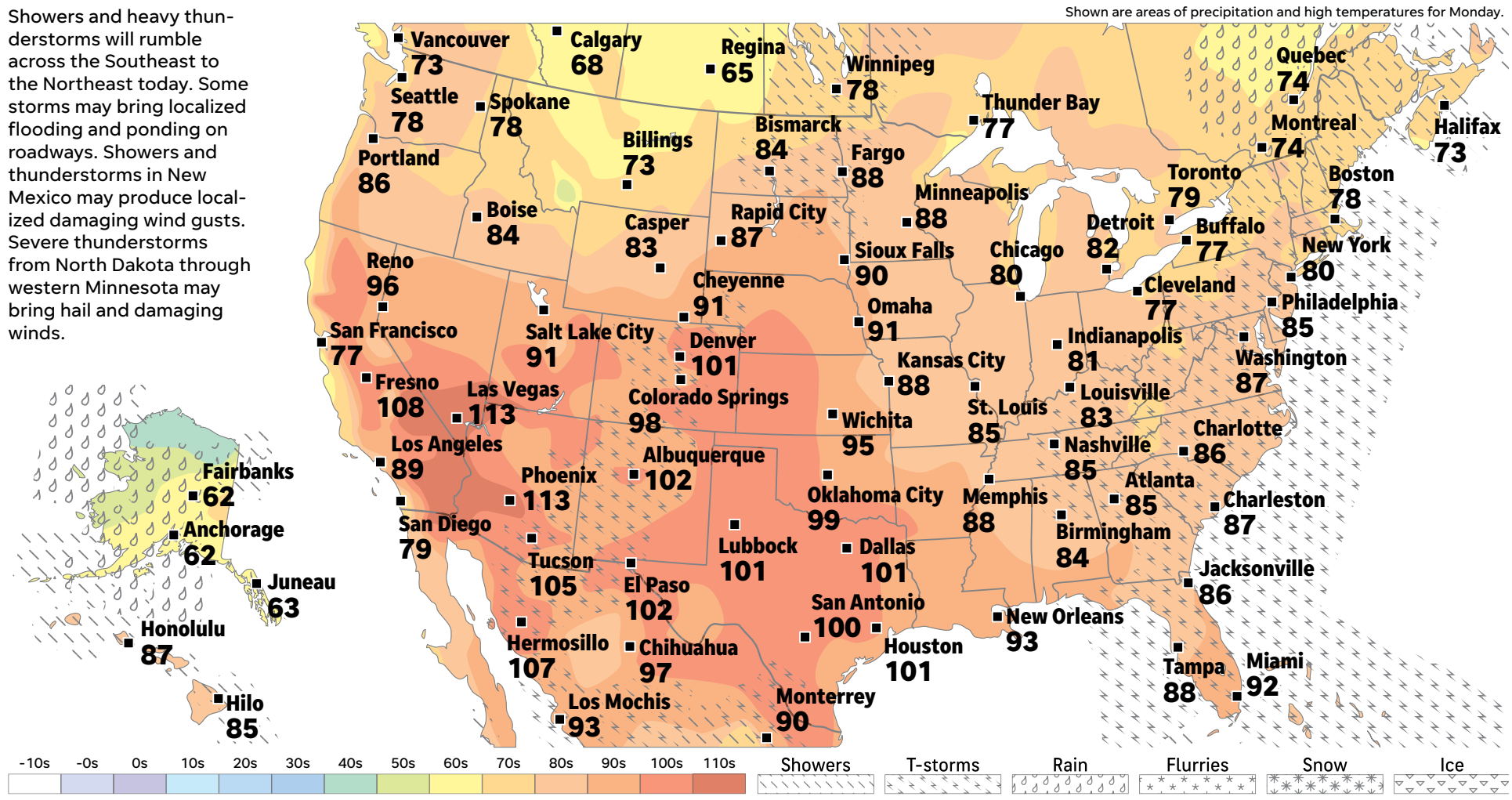


NATIONAL SUMMARY

Showers and heavy thunderstorms will rumble across the Southeast to the Northeast today. Some storms may bring localized flooding and ponding on roadways. Showers and thunderstorms in New Mexico may produce localized damaging wind gusts. Severe thunderstorms from North Dakota through western Minnesota may bring hail and damaging winds.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are areas of precipitation and high temperatures for Monday.



SUNDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)

High: **118** at Needles, CA
Low: **36** at Truckee, CA
Precip: **4.43"** at Williamsport, PA

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)

High: **121** at Omidiyeh, Iran
Low: **20** at Sutherland, South Africa
Precip: **4.60"** at Casiguran, Philippines

TODAY IN HISTORY

The South was in the midst of a record heat wave Aug. 3, 1980. Dallas, Texas, had its 42nd consecutive day with temperatures at or above 100 degrees. Norfolk, Va., sweltered in record-breaking 101-degree heat.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: In general, are storms more or less frequent in the U.S. in winter?

A: Less frequent

NATIONAL CITIES MONDAY

● Denotes possible travel delays

	High/low/W	Air Quality
● Aberdeen, SD	90/54/t	96
Abilene, TX	102/75/s	51
● Accomac, VA	81/69/t	23
Adrian, MI	83/55/s	25
Akron, OH	78/57/pc	75
● Alamogordo, NM	103/76/t	63
● Alexandria, VA	88/71/t	50
Alliance, OH	79/52/pc	75
Amarillo, TX	103/72/s	75
Ames, IA	85/63/s	75
● Anderson, SC	87/70/t	38
Appleton, WI	83/63/s	24
● Asheville, NC	80/66/t	38
Ashland, OH	78/52/pc	75
Athens, GA	85/70/t	37
Augusta, GA	88/72/t	35
Austin, TX	101/76/s	75
Bartlesville, OK	95/66/s	100
Battle Creek, MI	82/56/pc	25
Bedford, IN	81/61/s	32
Binghamton, NY	74/58/c	44
● Bluffton, SC	84/76/t	21
Bremerton, WA	78/51/pc	112
● Brockton, MA	78/59/t	25
Brownwood, TX	100/70/s	54
Burlington, IA	83/64/s	35
● Burlington, NC	86/70/t	42
● Burlington, VT	79/61/sh	26
Cambridge, OH	82/55/pc	38
Camdenton, MO	86/66/s	35
Canandaigua, NY	76/56/c	44
Canton, OH	80/53/pc	75
Carlsbad, NM	103/74/s	77
Chambersburg, PA	85/63/t	44
● Cherry Hill, NJ	84/66/t	50
Cincinnati, OH	81/63/pc	65
Clarksville, TN	86/67/pc	50
Coldwater, MI	81/56/s	25
Columbus, OH	81/60/pc	50
Corning, NY	77/51/c	32
Corpus Christi, TX	98/78/s	75
● Daytona Beach, FL	88/74/t	25
● Deming, NM	101/71/t	63
DeRidder, LA	96/73/s	64
Des Moines, IA	86/66/s	75
Detroit, MI	82/58/s	75
Devils Lake, ND	77/52/t	101
● Dover, NH	78/60/t	25
El Paso, TX	102/77/t	75
Elmira, NY	77/52/c	31
Erie, PA	77/60/pc	48
Eugene, OR	88/53/pc	25

	High/low/W	Air Quality
Evansville, IN	83/64/pc	25
● Fall River, MA	76/62/t	25
Farmington, NM	101/63/pc	49
● Fayetteville, NC	84/73/t	42
Fond du Lac, WI	81/59/s	35
● Fort Myers, FL	92/78/t	75
Fort Smith, AR	96/72/pc	47
● Framingham, MA	79/58/t	25
Freeport, IL	81/60/s	75
Fremont, OH	80/58/s	42
● Fort Collins, CO	101/59/t	75
Gadsden, AL	84/68/t	35
● Gainesville, FL	83/73/t	75
Galesburg, IL	82/61/s	75
● Gastonia, NC	86/70/t	45
Glen Rose, TX	104/75/s	63
Gonzales, LA	93/72/pc	64
Great Falls, MT	68/42/pc	124
Green Bay, WI	81/59/s	22
● Greenville, SC	85/69/t	38
● Hackensack, NJ	84/67/t	45
● Hagerstown, MD	85/66/t	44
Hattiesburg, MS	93/70/pc	35
Henderson, KY	83/63/pc	25
● Hendersonville, NC	80/66/t	38
Herkimer, NY	77/58/t	25
Hillsdale, MI	81/55/s	25
Holland, MI	80/56/pc	75
Hornell, NY	77/54/c	34
Houma, LA	91/75/c	53
Howell, MI	82/57/s	75
Hutchinson, KS	97/72/s	48
● Hyannis, MA	77/64/t	25
Indianapolis, IN	81/62/s	25
Iowa City, IA	84/64/s	41
Ithaca, NY	73/53/c	44
Jackson, MS	92/70/pc	42
Jackson, TN	85/66/pc	33
● Jacksonville, FL	86/74/t	75
● Jacksonville, NC	83/75/t	42
Kent, OH	79/51/pc	75
Kewanee, IL	80/60/pc	75
Keyser, WV	85/61/t	35
● Kinston, NC	84/74/t	42
● Knoxville, TN	82/69/t	50
Lafayette, IN	81/58/s	40
Lafayette, LA	94/75/s	53
● Lakeland, FL	90/74/t	75
Lansing, MI	82/57/s	25
● Las Cruces, NM	99/72/t	77
● Lebanon, PA	85/62/t	44
● Leesburg, FL	85/75/t	75

	High/low/W	Air Quality
● Levittown, PA	83/66/t	50
Lincoln, IL	82/61/pc	75
Louisville, KY	83/65/pc	25
Lubbock, TX	101/74/s	75
Manitowoc, WI	76/63/s	32
Mansfield, OH	77/56/pc	38
● Marshall, NC	79/64/t	38
Marshfield, WI	84/62/s	36
Massillon, OH	81/53/pc	75
● McLean, VA	88/69/t	50
● Melbourne, FL	90/74/t	25
Memphis, TN	88/71/pc	66
● Middletown, NY	81/58/t	39
● Milford, MA	77/58/t	25
Milwaukee, WI	77/62/s	75
Monroe, MI	83/58/s	75
Monroe, LA	95/70/pc	53
Montgomery, AL	88/70/pc	35
Muncie, IN	78/55/s	44
● Murfreesboro, TN	84/63/t	50
● Naples, FL	92/79/t	75
● Nashville, TN	85/68/t	50
● Neptune, NJ	82/70/t	50
● New Bedford, MA	76/62/t	25
● New Bern, NC	82/75/t	42
New Philadelphia, OH	80/51/pc	75
Newark, OH	82/54/pc	50
● Newton, NJ	81/57/t	45
● New York, NY	80/68/t	45
● Norwich, CT	77/59/t	34
● Ocala, FL	84/74/t	75
Oklahoma City, OK	99/70/s	100
Opelousas, LA	94/72/s	53
Oshkosh, WI	80/60/s	25
● Palm Beach, FL	91/80/t	25
Palm Springs, CA	116/87/s	100
● Panama City, FL	89/77/t	25
Pekin, IL	83/64/pc	75
Pensacola, FL	90/75/sh	75
Peoria, IL	83/63/pc	75
● Petersburg, VA	87/71/t	39
Phoenix, AZ	113/91/pc	97
Port Huron, MI	77/50/s	34
● Portsmouth, NH	79/63/t	25
● Poughkeepsie, NY	81/60/t	39
● Providence, RI	77/66/t	33
● Pueblo, CO	105/69/t	75
● Quincy, MA	79/62/t	25
Redding, CA	108/71/s	229
Reno, NV	96/62/s	75
Ravenna, OH	79/51/pc	75
Richmond, IN	80/55/s	51

	High/low/W	Air Quality
Rochester, NY	76/56/c	33
Rockford, IL	82/59/s	75
● Ruidoso, NM	90/66/t	68
Salem, OR	87/55/pc	25
Salina, KS	97/72/s	48
Salinas, CA	73/56/s	25
● Salisbury, MD	85/73/t	44
San Angelo, TX	99/72/s	49
● Sarasota, FL	90/78/t	75
● Savannah, GA	86/74/t	23
Sheboygan, WI	77/62/s	41
● Shelby, NC	83/68/t	45
Sherman, TX	100/75/s	68
Shreveport, LA	97/73/s	56
● Silver City, NM	92/68/t	51
Sioux Falls, SD	90/61/s	39
Somerset, PA	77/56/c	50
● Somerville, NJ	83/62/t	50
South Bend, IN	81/58/s	25
● Spartanburg, SC	86/70/t	38
Springfield, IL	83/61/pc	75
Springfield, MO	89/68/s	39
● St. Augustine, FL	85/75/t	75
St. Cloud, MN	87/64/s	75
St. George, UT	110/80/s	75
● Staunton, VA	83/65/t	25
Stevens Point, WI	86/62/s	33
Stockton, CA	106/64/s	93
● Stroudsburg, PA	82/57/t	45
● Stuart, FL	91/76/t	25
Sturgis, MI	80/57/s	25
● Tallahassee, FL	87/72/t	75
Thibodaux, LA	92/73/sh	53
Topeka, KS	88/67/s	43
Tuscaloosa, AL	88/69/pc	59
Utica, NY	75/58/c	29
Ventura, CA	74/64/s	50
Victorville, CA	105/66/s	108
● Vineland, NJ	84/66/t	50
Visalia, CA	107/65/s	54
● Washington, DC	87/73/t	50
● Watertown, SD	89/56/t	50
Wausau, WI	84/62/s	30
● Waynesboro, PA	85/64/t	44
● White Plains, NY	79/63/t	37
Wichita Falls, TX	103/72/s	80
● Wilmington, DE	84/69/t	44
● Wilmington, NC	84/75/t	42
Wisconsin Rapids, WI	86/62/s	33
Wooster, OH	78/54/pc	75
● Worcester, MA	75/63/t	25
● York, PA	85/64/t	44

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Monday High/low/W	Tuesday High/low/W
● Acapulco	91/78/t	91/78/pc
Addis Ababa	72/55/r	71/55/r
Algiers	98/76/s	94/72/s
Amman	97/74/s	99/74/s
Amsterdam	92/70/pc	87/70/s
Ankara	94/64/s	94/64/s
● Asuncion	80/66/c	78/64/t
Athens	94/75/s	95/77/s
Auckland	58/53/s	59/40/s
Baghdad	119/96/s	118/95/s
● Bangkok	94/80/r	93/81/r
Beijing	91/75/t	91/76/t
Beirut	90/78/s	88/79/s
Belgrade	98/69/s	100/70/s
Berlin	85/66/s	90/70/sh
Bogota	67/50/r	66/50/pc
● Brussels	95/71/pc	87/66/sh
Bucharest	95/65/s	98/67/s
Budapest	101/71/s	104/66/s
● Buenos Aires	61/54/c	59/56/pc
Cairo	100/75/pc	97/76/pc
Cape Town	77/48/pc	72/52/pc
Caracas	89/78/t	90/77/pc
Casablanca	91/68/pc	88/70/s
● Colombo	84/79/r	86/80/r
Copenhagen	73/58/pc	75/65/pc
Damascus	107/70/s	107/70/s
Dublin	71/59/r	73/55/sh
● Geneva	94/67/t	91/64/t
● Guatemala City	84/64/t	81/64/t
● Hanoi	92/79/r	91/78/r
Harare	72/45/s	73/44/pc
● Havana	91/74/r	91/75/r
Helsinki	67/58/pc	68/57/pc
Hong Kong	84/80/sh	86/79/r
● Jakarta	92/77/sh	91/76/sh
Jerusalem	91/71/s	89/71/s
Johannesburg	66/38/s	68/41/s
Kabul	94/70/pc	92/67/pc
● Khartoum	100/85/pc	102/83/t
Kyiv	93/69/s	91/71/s
Kingston	93/82/pc	92/81/pc
La Paz	58/26/s	60/27/s
Lagos	84/74/sh	83/76/c
Lima	75/69/s	76/67/pc
Lisbon	79/66/pc	82/68/pc
London	91/64/pc	83/63/sh
Madrid	93/66/pc	95/66/s
● Manila	85/79/t	85/79/t
● Mexico City	78/58/sh	79/57/r
Milan	100/74/pc	100/74/pc
Mombasa	84/69/sh	86/70/s
Montevideo	62/52/c	61/52/c
Montreal	74/61/r	83/63/s
Moscow	77/59/pc	78/61/pc
Nairobi	71/56/c	72/55/c
● New Delhi	89/80/r	87/79/t
Panama City	91/76/t	90/77/r
Paris	94/70/pc	91/68/s
Port-au-Prince	101/73/c	100/74/t
Rio de Janeiro	78/67/c	79/69/pc
Riyadh	114/91/pc	113/90/pc
Rome	92/71/pc	93/72/s
San Jose	85/69/r	85/69/t
● San Salvador	90/69/r	90/68/r
Santiago	67/48/c	62/47/c
Sao Paulo	77/61/pc	79/62/pc
Sarajevo	96/62/s	98/63/s
Shanghai	101/81/s	97/83/pc
● Singapore	92/81/r	92/80/t
Stockholm	68/50/pc	73/57/pc
Sydney	73/47/pc	67/44/s
Taipei	99/78/t	98/77/pc
● Tegucigalpa	89/68/t	88/67/t
Tehran	96/76/s	97/79/pc
Tokyo	83/74/c	83/74/c
Toronto	79/57/pc	81/62/s
Tunis	106/79/s	105/80/s
Vancouver	73/59/s	77/61/s
Vienna	101/69/s	103/72/pc
Warsaw	86/67/t	90/68/t
Yerevan	94/72/s	97/71/s
Zagreb	102/64/s	104/67/s
Zurich	95/64/pc	93/64/t

● Denotes possible travel delays Monday

Weather(W): **s**-sunny, **pc**-partly cloudy, **c**-cloudy, **sh**-showers, **t**-thunderstorms, **r**-rain, **sf**-snow flurries, **sn**-snow, **i**-ice.

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CONFLICT IN GAZA

Israeli strikes kill 18; minister says no deal to halt attacks

Nidal al-Mughrabi and Steven Scheer
REUTERS

Israeli airstrikes hit Gaza for a second straight day on Aug. 2 , killing at least 18 Palestinians, medics said, despite President Donald Trump's announcement of a breakthrough in efforts to implement last year's ceasefire agreement.

From dawn, Israeli warplanes hit Gaza City in the north, the central city of Deir al-Balah and the southern area of Khan Younis, causing the biggest daily death toll in weeks, according to Palestinian health officials.

Trump's assertion on July 30 that Palestinian Hamas militants and other armed groups had agreed to disarm had raised hopes of a turning point in efforts to end the conflict.

On Aug. 2, Israeli Energy Minister Eli Cohen – a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet – said the government would give Hamas the opportunity to disarm but that he was "very skeptical" that would happen.

Cohen told Israel's Army Radio there had been no deal to halt attacks on Gaza and that he saw a need for Israel, which already controls 70% of the enclave, to take full control of it if Hamas did not disarm.

"In the deal we signed with the United States, our stance is that Hamas must be dismantled. This is the first thing that must happen," he added.

A spokesperson for Netanyahu's office told Reuters that Israel expressed concerns to the United States on the disarmament plan.

"The most important concern for Israel is that nothing can happen before Hamas completely and truly disarms ...," said Doron Spielman, a spokesperson for the Israeli prime minister's office.

Strikes on Deir al-Balah killed at least four people, Palestinian health officials said, and a separate attack wounded five people and set some tents ablaze in Mawasi, near Khan Younis, according to the civil emergency service.

A couple and their 9-year-old son were killed in a strike on a house in Mawasi, Palestinian officials said.

Another couple was killed with their child in a strike on an apartment in Gaza City, where two more people died in a strike on a tent near the office of the Egyptian representative mission, medics said. Later on Aug. 2, another two people were killed in the city's eastern Zeitoun neighborhood, they added.

One person was killed near Jabalia in northern Gaza, Palestinian officials said.

The Israeli military said a strike on an apartment in Deir al-Balah was targeting two commanders of Hamas' elite "Nukhba" force.

The Gaza City and Jabalia strikes also targeted "military operatives," it added.

A mourner carries the body of a Palestinian who was killed in Israeli strikes, according to medics, during a funeral, in Gaza City, on Aug. 2.
DAWOUD ABU ALKAS/REUTERS

> **"This escalation, coinciding with progress on the political track, clearly demonstrates that the occupation government is seeking to undermine efforts aimed at ending the war and to impose facts on the ground by force."**
> **Basem Naim**
> Hamas official

In a subsequent attack on Gaza City, medics said an Israeli airstrike on a car killed at least three Palestinians near Saraya Square.

Trump's Board of Peace, the U.S.-led body overseeing the ceasefire, published on July 31 a 15-point roadmap setting out the final steps for implementing the agreement.

Nickolay Mladenov, the Board of Peace's lead envoy for Gaza, said the strikes across Gaza came despite efforts by the board and mediators to bring Palestinian factions to agree on the roadmap for the implementation of Trump's plan.

He said in a post on X that he was working with parties, mediators and regional partners to "de-escalate and create the space for the full implementation of the President's plan."

"Achieving a lasting peace is hard but achievable if everyone makes their best efforts," Mladenov said.

At least 1,230 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes since a ceasefire was reached in October, according to Gaza health authorities.

Four Israeli soldiers were killed over the same period, according to Israeli tallies.

Hamas has said Israel must stop its attacks in Gaza and pull its troops back, in accordance with other key terms of the ceasefire deal, before it will agree to hand over weapons to a new Palestinian body named to run Gaza.

A senior Hamas official said on Aug. 2 the group had demonstrated "considerable flexibility," but accused Israel of wanting to impose a de facto situation on the ground by intensifying its strikes.

"This escalation, coinciding with progress on the political track, clearly demonstrates that the occupation government is seeking to undermine efforts aimed at ending the war and to impose facts on the ground by force," Basem Naim said in a statement.

Former senior Fatah official Mohammed Dahlan, who is based in the United Arab Emirates, said in a Facebook post that Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and a senior adviser involved in the U.S. initiative, had told him he was working with the Israeli side to stop attacks on Gaza.

Dahlan said contacts with the United States were continuing to ensure the agreement was fully implemented.

Reuters has reached out to the U.S. State Department for comment on Dahlan's remarks.

Latest 'Spider-Man' opens at $927M

Weekend box office sales near the global record

Dawn Chmielewski
REUTERS

LOS ANGELES – "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" brought in $927 million in worldwide ticket sales, including $355 million in the United States and Canada, to deliver the second most lucrative opening weekend of all time for a film, both domestically and globally.

The movie, which marks actor Tom Holland's fourth outing as the web-slinging superhero, depicts Peter Parker fighting crime in a world that has forgotten he is Spider-Man. Zendaya co-stars as MJ, the love of Parker's life. Audiences returned for a film that was grounded in Parker's struggles with loneliness and his pursuit of human connection.

"'Spider-Man: Brand New Day' is fundamentally a movie about friendship, about the balm of connection in all our lives, and that is resonant to audiences of all ages and all around the world," said Tom Rothman, chairman and chief executive of Sony Pictures Entertainment's Motion Picture Group.

Data from Rentrak indicates "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" had the highest domestic gross opening since the COVID-19 pandemic and the second-highest of all time, in North America and worldwide, behind the 2019 release of the superhero film "Avengers: Endgame." That film raked in an inflation-adjusted $1.6 billion in global ticket sales, including $467 million in the United States and Canada, in its opening.

Internationally, "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" grossed $572 million in opening weekend ticket sales, with China leading international markets with $121 million in ticket sales, according to the studio.
MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS

Internationally, "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" grossed $572 million in opening weekend ticket sales, with China leading international markets with $121 million in ticket sales, according to the studio.

The latest installment has been well-received, scoring a 90% rating from critics and 98% approval from moviegoers on Rotten Tomatoes.

Paul Dergarabedian, head of marketplace trends for Rentrak, said on July 31 that the franchise is approaching the $10 billion mark in unadjusted worldwide theatrical box office.

The performance of "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" fuels an already-robust summer box office, which has been buoyed by such major releases as "Toy Story 5" and "The Odyssey."

The overall domestic box office performance remains below pre-pandemic levels.

WALL ST WEEK AHEAD

Teetering stocks face earnings, jobs reports

Lewis Krauskopf
REUTERS

NEW YORK – U.S. employment data and a batch of corporate results this week will keep equity investors on edge over the direction of the stock market, which has been buffeted by geopolitical tensions, uncertain interest-rate policy and sizable moves in heavyweight technology shares.

The S&P 500 gained for the week, after some big daily swings, and was roughly 1.6% below the benchmark index's June 2 record high.

Investors were digesting contrasting earnings results from megacap companies whose massive capital spending has been at the heart of the bullish AI trade this year.

Microsoft shares posted their biggest single-day percentage jump since 2008 after its upbeat forecast on cloud growth, while Meta Platforms tumbled after it reported a plunge in cash flow.

The Federal Reserve's monetary policy meeting and resulting "hawkish hold" on July 29 also left investors unclear about the implications for stocks amid what many said were mixed messages over the central bank's plan for reining in inflation.

The monthly U.S. jobs report, due on Aug. 7, will command Wall Street's attention along with results from companies including drugmaker Eli Lilly and semiconductor designer Advanced Micro Devices.

The first quarterly report is due on Aug. 4 for Elon Musk's SpaceX, whose shares have stumbled after their post-initial public offering surge in July and which could have broader ramifications for investors' risk appetite.

"It's an overall market that is searching to regain its footing and kind of feeling around for where that is going to come from," said Yung-Yu Ma, chief investment strategist at PNC Financial Services Group.

The S&P 500 remains up over 9% in 2026. Investors have pointed to fundamental support for stocks from strong overall corporate profit growth, while a recent broadening of equity gains to lagging sectors could indicate more durability for the nearly 4-year-old bull market.

But concerns that some areas of the AI trade have become overheated have weighed on indexes, especially on high-flying shares of semiconductor companies that retreated in July. A re-escalation in the U.S. war with Iran is also complicating the picture, with a resurgence in oil prices driving up Treasury yields on renewed inflation worries.

"The market has kind of been held hostage to the price of oil and the yield on the 10-year (Treasury), both of which have moved higher," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist at B. Riley Wealth. "We'll see if we can get any relief on that front next week."

Wall Street was still grappling with the Fed's decision to keep interest rates unchanged, as three of its 12 policymakers dissented from the vote in favor of a hike.

Confusion centered on the press conference from new Fed Chair Kevin Warsh, who was presiding over his second meeting. W

arsh repeated his firm intent to bring inflation down to 2%, but investors expressed uncertainty about how he planned to reach that longstanding target. Data on showed the core Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index – an inflation gauge the Fed tracks – rising 3.3% year on year in June.

Warsh's aim to reduce the Fed's guidance telegraphing its rate plans could also bring new market scrutiny to economic data, including the upcoming jobs report.

The new leadership at the Fed is "a meaningful change in terms of mindset around forward guidance, transparency and communication," said Jim Baird, chief investment officer with Plante Moran Financial Advisors.

"What we'll likely see as a result is the potential for maybe a little bit more volatility around key economic releases ... because there's just a little less clarity around where we're heading."

The nonfarm payrolls report for July is expected to show an increase of 83,000 jobs, and an unemployment rate of 4.3%, according to a Reuters poll.

Wildfires

Continued from Page 1NN

profound emotional and human dimension to the situation," he said.

Europe, the continent that is warming fastest, is suffering a torrid summer as a series of heatwaves spark deadly fires, prompting calls for an overhaul of the systems and resources available to tackle them.

According to civil defence figures, France has 256,400 firefighters, of whom about 200,000 are volunteers, with the rest made up of full-time professionals and military personnel.

"We need between 250,000 and 300,000 more volunteer firefighters," said Bruno Menard, general secretary of the French Volunteer Firefighters' Union. "Over the past 25 years, we have professionalized the volunteer force; they do the same work as public sector staff."

Menard wants an increase in the compensation for volunteers, which ranges from $9.90 per hour for a basic firefighter to $15.13 for an officer, and more to be done to rehire former volunteers.

Interior Minister Laurent Nunez says France's civil protection budget has nearly doubled since President Emmanuel Macron took office in 2017. The interior ministry did not reply to a request for comment on the firefighters' specific demands.

Residents and firefighters work to extinguish an advancing wildfire near Formariz in Zamora province, Spain, on July 29. UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

Seasonal workers deployed

The concerns in France are echoed across the border in Spain.

A decentralized system means there is no official count of how many wildfire firefighters are employed, with each region recruiting independently. Spain's two largest trade unions, CCOO and UGT, estimate there are around 35,000 wildfire firefighters nationwide, most of whom work on temporary six-month contracts.

Staffing rises to roughly 40,000 during the peak summer fire season, when auxiliary crews are hired.

Jorge Nieto, a CCOO representative and coordinator of forestry and environmental officers in the Castile-Leon region north of Madrid, says the set-up is not sustainable.

"Forest firefighters in this region are the worst paid in Spain. These are people risking their lives for little more than the minimum wage. Most earn no more than EUR1,400 a month," or about $1,600, he said.

"What is needed is a professional workforce with decent working conditions."

In Madrid, around 60 public-sector firefighters have been on strike for more than 1,170 days, seeking official recognition of their status and rights as wildfire firefighters.

After national authorities took charge of firefighting operations, they were formally deployed alongside other crews.

Spanish firefighters and union representatives argue that workers should be employed all year round, carrying out forest management and prevention work during the winter, including clearing vegetation and maintaining firebreaks around towns and farms in sparsely populated rural areas, which could help reduce the scale and intensity of increasingly destructive wildfires.

"The vegetation-clearing and prevention work that could be assigned to wildfire firefighters during periods of lower fire risk simply isn't being done," said Carlos Cuenca, a firefighter in Madrid and member of a specialized national emergency unit.

Spain's environment minister, Sara Aagesen, said more money was being made available.

"Between 2024 and 2026, the government increased funding for wildfires by 30% for prevention and 34% for firefighting operations," she said.

"We have also strengthened our specialized wildfire brigades by increasing their budget by 47% and improving their working conditions. We will continue along that path."

Jose Antonio Garcia Abarca, a firefighter in the Madrid region, said the wildfire there was a new phenomenon as it threatened to encroach on more built-up areas.

"It's heartbreaking to drive through places you've known all your life and see the devastation," he said. "But we have to keep going. We're still in the wildfire season and there's still work to do."

Lebanon

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disarmament" of Hezbollah – which is not a party to the deal and has raised the prospect of internal strife if the state tries to disarm it by force.

Two days after the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, Hezbollah pulled Lebanon into the war by firing at Israel.

Israeli forces responded with aerial bombardments reaching as far as Beirut, and by seizing a strip of land extending about 6 miles deep into southern Lebanon. Even after a ceasefire in June, Israeli troops remained in the zone, razing villages and ordering residents who had fled not to return.

The United States began mediating talks between Lebanon and Israel in mid-April, and setting out the pilot zone program in early June.

More than six weeks later, Lebanese soldiers deployed to Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh to implement the first zone after Israeli forces pulled back.

Within hours, Israeli units still stationed nearby in an adjacent village accused Lebanese troops of deploying too close, and fired warning shots to keep them back. An Israeli military official said troops were adjusting their "force posture" in the first pilot zone, without saying whether those who had withdrawn from Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh had left Lebanon altogether or redeployed to other parts of the south.

The Lebanese troops spent two days clearing rubble and accompanying paramedics into the village to recover the bodies of Hezbollah fighters. On July 24, they finally allowed displaced residents to return, in carefully managed convoys. Most homes were too badly damaged from bombing for anyone to stay.

Mayor Abed Ezzedin told Reuters around half of Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh was in ruins, and reconstruction seemed far away.

Lebanese soldiers stand guard on July 26 in the town of Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh, after the withdrawal of Israeli forces under a plan mediated by the United States. AZIZ TAHER/REUTERS

"What kind of pilot zone are we talking about? And what kind of security and safety? There are still 70 or 80 occupied villages," he said.

"If they (Israeli troops) are going to withdraw from one village while remaining on the edge of the next – we can't do that. It won't work. And what about the reconstruction we keep talking about? Without security and peace of mind, we can't rebuild. We cannot lay a single stone on top of another in Zawtar."

Israeli troops remain stationed in a semicircle of towns to the north and east of Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh, the strategic Beaufort Castle on a commanding ridge just 4 miles to the east, and dozens of villages further south.

A key test of Lebanon's willingness to disarm Hezbollah in exchange for more Israeli withdrawals could lie a few miles away, along a mountain ridge known as Ali Taher.

Hezbollah is suspected of operating a command center and weapons stores there, Lebanese security sources told Reuters.

> **"It's all just talk ... There's nothing left to hope for."**
>
> **Zeinab Loubani**
> Displaced from a town near Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh, Lebanon

Hassan Jouni, a Lebanese analyst and retired general, said it was unlikely Israeli troops would withdraw from any more nearby positions "until the problem of Ali Taher is resolved" – either with Israel capturing the ridge or Lebanese troops clearing out Hezbollah weapons stores. Jouni noted that the June 26 deal does not set a timeline for either withdrawal or disarmament – and said disarming Hezbollah by force could, at worst, trigger civil war.

Under the deal, disarmament must be verified by a third party to enable the Israeli military to "progressively redeploy out of Lebanese territory." Neither a third party nor a mechanism for verification has been established, Jouni said.

"The timeline for the Israeli occupation, based on this formula, will take a long time."

To speed the process, Lebanon intends to propose in talks with Israel this week that the occupied zone be divided into two or three large pilot zones encompassing dozens of towns, instead of Israel withdrawing village by village, the Lebanese military official said.

But Israeli officials have said troops will remain in southern Lebanon as long as necessary, and residents of Israeli-occupied land doubt they will ever see their hometowns again.

"How is Israel going to withdraw? It's not that simple. They did the impossible to get in here; they aren't just going to leave overnight," said Zeinab Loubani, a 54-year-old mother displaced from a town near Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh.

"I'm telling you, I don't believe it for a second. It's all just talk ... There's nothing left to hope for."

Iran

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Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, a U.S. ally.

"Based on this request, I have agreed, for the future benefit of the WORLD and, likewise, the survival of a successful and prosperous Iran, to cancel the attack, subject to being able to rapidly make a DEAL," Trump wrote.

As he returned to Washington from a weekend in New Jersey, Trump told reporters on Aug. 3 that a negotiation would begin on the afternoon of Aug. 3 but did not provide details of where it would take place or who would be involved.

Asked if there was a deadline for Iran to come to an agreement, Trump declined to answer. "Would I rather make a deal? I'm not looking to kill people because people die, a lot of people die, and we don't want that," Trump said in response.

Trump has repeatedly issued threats that he would escalate the war on Iran he launched along with Israel in late February, only to allow more time for talks, which have so far not led to a comprehensive deal.

Trump's apparent de-escalation after days of threats of new attacks from each side was the latest twist in the war. Attacks have spread across the Gulf to the Red Sea and even a Mediterranean facility in Egypt. Iran has largely closed the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas before the start of the war, causing energy prices to rise and stoking broader inflation.

The president has argued that his stated goal of keeping Iran from gaining nuclear weapons justifies higher fuel costs in the near term, but the economic pain has put political pressure on him to find a way to end the conflict.

Oil prices were down more than 4% in early trading on Aug. 3.

At a cabinet meeting on July 31, Trump said he believed U.S. negotiators, including his son-in-law Jared Kushner, special envoy Steve Witkoff and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, could reach a deal with Iran. As an April ceasefire in the war unraveled last month, benchmark Brent crude futures jumped 24%, and analysts polled by Reuters expect prices to rise further this year.

Diplomacy

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi held phone calls with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir to discuss diplomatic efforts, Iran's state media reported on Aug. 2.

The official Iranian news agency IRNA reported earlier that negotiations between Tehran and Oman over the Strait of Hormuz were in their final stages, citing Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said negotiations were focused on agreeing a new route through the strait, adding that it had "no link to the Strait of Hormuz being opened or closed. That is a separate discussion."

In July, Iran publicly rejected an Omani proposal, backed by Gulf states, to manage the strait they share. People familiar with the matter had told Reuters the plan included the collection of voluntary fees for using the strait.

Eli Cohen, Israel's energy minister and a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet, said there was close security and intelligence coordination between Israel and the United States on everything happening in the region.

But he added: "With or without an agreement, and regardless of any external commitments, if Iran attempts to renew its nuclear program or advance its ballistic missile industries, we will be there. We will take action, and we will strike."

Trump and Netanyahu met on July 28 in Washington, with an Israeli official saying they had explored all possible paths to curb Iran's nuclear program, including diplomacy, economic pressure and force. Tehran denies it is seeking a nuclear weapon.